

Obituary: Alan Bide 1944-2008



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There were countless tributes to Alan when he died last October. Many said that he left a large hole in the industry. These sentiments are often soon lost in time; but not with Alan. Six months later, many people in the industry still say that they expect him to be on the line when the phone rings. He was frequently in contact with a huge number of people, often discussing a new and constructive idea that had been developed into a cunning plan. These ideas were sometimes to benefit his business or to benefit independent advice but frequently they were to benefit the agricultural industry as a whole. Alan had the clarity of mind to see that in order to prosper in agriculture the whole industry needed to move forward.

Alan joined an agricultural merchanting business in 1968. The timing was impeccable owing to the large

scale adoption of new technology from the early 1970s onwards. Alan soon recognised that farmers needed help to exploit fully that technology for their individual businesses. He established Hampshire Arable Systems in 1978 to provide independent advice to farmers. It was at the start of independent advice and Alan, together with other pioneers, soon established the Association of Independent Crop Consultants. Now, around half the arable area in England pays for independent advice, much of it delivered by agronomists who had been supported and encouraged by Alan in the early stages of their careers.

In addition to building a successful business, he gave his time and his valued business skills, knowledge of the industry and technical expertise to the industry, through serving on committees of organisations such as the British Crop Protection Council, the Home-Grown Cereals Authority, the Rothamsted Research Association and The Morley Agricultural Foundation. He also provided crop consultancy in Eastern Europe and Saudi Arabia. This was all driven by his desire to improve the technical base of the industry, his thirst for knowledge and his appetite for debate. He frequently attended and chaired conferences, including AAB conferences, and was not shy in quizzing and often challenging speakers.

He was also great company and a generous and thoughtful host. He was devoted to his family and his humour was often self-deprecating. In his later years he was a very keen golfer. His swing was unique and had its roots in the hockey fields of southern England. His attitude to life was mirrored in his attitude to golf. I was with him in Scotland shortly before he died. Despite the fact that he knew his cancer had advanced, he was positive and good company. Whilst standing in a small copse around 20 yards left of the green, I witnessed his tee shot at the short final hole. His ball hit the trees above me and fell to ground close to where I stood. He came up to me, looked me in the eye and, to my total amazement, said "it was going straight for the flag". This typified Alan: however events blew him off course, he was always positive and going for the flag.

Jim Orson, March 2009



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