

My knowledge of Alan Rees

by John Ballantine

Alan Tait Rees MBE was born in Wales on 4 August 1931. In 1976 he came to live in Edinburgh following his appointment as deputy director of Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council. (EVOC)

Alan was heavily involved in work to help disabled people from that time onwards, an involvement which lasted for the rest of his life until ill health restricted his activities a few years ago. The international year of disabled people in 1981 inspired him to set up Handicabs Lothian in 1982.

The involvement of Alan in the setting up of SATA is described in the publication "The SATA Story" which he wrote.

Alan was regarded as the founder of SATA and served as its secretary from, I think, 2000 until he was succeeded by Mike Harrison in 2012. During this time the amount of work Alan performed on behalf of SATA was prodigious. On at least two occasions circumstances forced him to combine the post of treasurer with that of secretary. At one time it was estimated that Alan carried out approximately eighty per cent of all the work of SATA personally.

In 1995 I was involved in Disability Scotland (where I got to know Bob Benson and Professor Fred Edwards) and became aware through them of the setting up of SATA which I joined shortly after its inception in 1995. Until 2004 I was employed full time in the legal profession and unable to attend SATA meetings. I went to my first SATA meeting at Dial a Journey in Stirling where I met Alan Rees. (I may have met him in 1995 or 1996 but I am not sure about that.) That meeting was in August 2004.

When the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland was set up (by Sarah Boyack MSP) in 2002 Alan was appointed one of its first members.

In 2007 Alan was required to take on the role of treasurer again (due to the resignation of Peter Ingram-Monck) and was finding it difficult to combine those duties with being SATA secretary. At that point the incoming Scottish government (SNP) had proposed to abolish MACS and Alan had resigned from MACS to lead the campaign against its abolition.

I wrote to him volunteering to become SATA treasurer. Alan took time to think about it but invited me to meet him. As a result, I was elected SATA treasurer in September 2007 and took over as treasurer shortly thereafter.

From 2007 to 2012 Alan and I worked very closely together particularly in responding to consultations. We attended many meetings together and he gave me numerous lifts.

Alan led the campaign that saved MACS from the threat of abolition in 2007 and without his efforts I would not have been able to apply for membership of that body in 2008. Stanley Flett, at that time the chair of SATA, assisted Alan in saving MACS and I attended a meeting during that campaign in the Scottish parliament with Alan, Stan and other SATA members.

Alan continued to attend SATA meetings until ill health prevented him travelling to Camelon. He continued attending Edinburgh Access Panel meetings until about two years ago by which time his ill health was very serious. On one of the last occasions I saw him (about 2017) he had offered me a lift home from an Access Panel meeting but he wished to take a photograph of the premises of EVOC (whose history he was writing) after the meeting I went with Alan to EVOC and waited outside the building whilst he took photographs. Despite his illness Alan was able to write to me and sign a document on behalf of SATA earlier this year.

Alan was an outstanding Christian man (the son of a Welsh Methodist minister) whose long life of Christian service included working for and on behalf of disabled people for forty years. He founded Handicabs Lothian, was one of the founders of SATA and played a leading role in saving MACS from abolition. He was also my friend for the last fifteen years of his life.