

The past leaves its mark

Alan and Kat Thomas are proud to wear their pasts on their sleeves – literally. They spoke to **Nic Irwin** about their love of tattoos



PASSION inspires Alan Thomas's art, be it the quintessential tattoo of a Liverpool fan – a red Liverbird stands proud on the right of his chest – or a tribute to his children and his wife – each one of Alan's 30-something tattoos tells a story.

And the 43-year-old dad of six is on a mission to cover his entire body in ink.

Although his first tattoos were homemade efforts – crude Indian ink and puncture marks which have since been mostly covered up – it's in the last two years that he has really gone to town, spending about £2,000 in the process.

As a fan of the U.S. animated comedy *Family Guy*, characters Stewie and Brian Griffin, a baby and a dog, make an appear-

ance on Alan's right shin. He plans to have the name of the show, in its block-capital font, underneath the design. Higher up his leg, he has praying hands, with the words God bless us.

Not to be outdone, his left shin has a sexy pin-up with the words Love Wins, and an unfinished design on his thigh.

"They don't really hurt, but I wouldn't suggest anyone has a tattoo on their knee." Springing from Alan's left thigh is a panther, coloured black, except for the front left paw which descends across his knee. "It hurt when they did the outline, so I'm building up to have it filled in. I will have it done, I might use numbing cream."

On his back is a Celtic cross and the words "We Won't Forget" in tribute to his dad

Brian, known as Pops, who passed away in August 2005. The tattoo took two to three hours over several sittings.

"My dad one is my favourite," says Alan. Me and my dad were close. If we needed to talk about anything he was there. He died of cancer and I was there for his last breath.

"He had a few tattoos, just on his arms. He had my mum's name on him."

And the most eye-catching of Alan's chest tattoos surely has to be one which is again dedicated to his dad. "It's the Robin Reliant from *Only Fools And Horses*, in front of the Nelson Mandela flats. My dad was a big fan of the show. He was a bit of a wheeler-dealer

himself. It even says Pops on the number plate."

There's space, Alan says, to have a picture of his dad's face, somewhere near Del Boy and Rodney's iconic van.

It's not just his dad, but family which crops up time and time again in the designs.

His eldest children Donna and Stacey, from his marriage to first wife Mandy, are named on the underside of each forearm in old English font.

And while neither have as many tattoos as their dad they have both been inked.

His younger children, from his marriage to third wife Katrina, known as Kat, are also



People



listed, eight-year-old Kyle, and their seven-year-old triplets Ty, Luke and Charley.

And while Kat's name is on his right arm and left hand accompanied by a swallow, his ex-wife Mandy, who has since passed away, is still remembered on his left arm with her name over a red heart.

"It doesn't bother me," says Kat, aged 31, who until she met Alan was tattoo free.

The couple had Kyle in 2004, the triplets in 2005 and married on July 8, 2006. "We had been together nine years and it was only last year that I had his name on me. I think it's a trust thing."

"This is for keeps. We fall out, but it makes us stronger," says Alan who lives with Kat, their children and a variety of pets in West Street, Crewe. The couple have Bullseye, a Staffie crossed with a Jack Russell, two birds and a snake.

Thinking back to before she met Alan, Kat said: "I was a bit of a wuss. I didn't have any tattoos."

"We went to Rhyl in 2005, the year we had the triplets and I said I would have a small one on my shoulder blade. It's a little Chinese symbol meaning 'love'."

"Then I had four stars with my kids name on them."

From there, Kat didn't look back and she now attracts attention for her own tattoos, although her mother would prefer her to wear a long sleeve top when she visits her home.

"I know my mum doesn't like them. If I go shopping she doesn't like people coming up and talking about them. I do tend to wear a long top if I go round there, but if it's hot, there's nothing I can do."

"People come up to me and ask if it hurts. I would never tell someone to have it at the bottom of their back, it made me feel physically sick."

In total, Kat has four tattoos on her back including the first symbol, Alan's name, butterflies, and a one-off joint tattoo with Alan. Part of a poem on her left shoulder blade is next to the right wing of a bird.

It matches up to a tattoo Alan has on his right shoulder accompanied by the left wing of the bird.

Together the poem reads, "I was incomplete until I found you. Now I am complete."

It's hardly surprising that given the amount of tattoos the couple have, they return in the main, to one tattooist, a publicity-shy artist to be known only as DK.

"You get people who have half a heart necklace," said Kat, a stay-at-home



Alan Thomas shows off the tattoos on his head and back. Opposite page: Alan and Kat's shared tattoo, top and below from left: Alan's Robin Reliant tattoo; the one he had in memory of his dad; Kat's children's names; Kat's Chinese symbols; and the Liverbird.



mum. "We asked DK if he could come up with a design and he came up with the two wings. That represents the love we have for each other."

But Kat's tattoos don't stop there, on her left arm she has the initials of her four children in stars and Chinese symbols meaning happiness and families surrounded by lilies.

On her right arm is a water dragon, four stars, and a rose. "I had that done for my nan because she died last year."

Then like Alan, she has also embraced her own passions. A fan of the TV show Charmed she has a large triquetra, which is a shape featured on the cover of a book repeatedly mentioned in the American programme.

Kat says: "I had them done for me, because I'm happy. I have my family, I'm strong, and the triquetra because it has lots of different meanings."

"If I don't know what I want I trust DK to finish a design. He'll say 'I know you like butterflies and stars. I trust him completely.'"

And it was that same trust that Alan put his faith in when he sat back down in the tattooist's chair last year.

Three claw marks come out of either side of Alan's neck, with blood drips and above them the back of his shaved head gives more space for his art work.

"I knew what was going on the right hand side of my head, a tribal tiger, and a tribal dragon on the left, but I didn't know about the main bit. I wanted something for the back and I just said 'don't tell me until it's finished'. I had no idea what he was putting on the back of me."

Over three sittings last year, DK designed a cross with a triquetra.

"I saw someone who had their head done and I just asked him about it in the middle of Morrisons. Now I get stopped and asked about mine. It's art really. I walk down the street and I am proud."

"I have had funny looks. We were once on a bus and a couple got up and moved because they didn't want to look at the tattoos. It doesn't bother me."

And his designs continue, with some overlapping or covering up out-dated or grown tattoos.

One design is a black box with a question mark left in 'white', the symbol associated with the Black Eyed Peas track Where Is the

Love. From music to football, his tattoos also include his birth sign Pisces which shows two koi carp jumping and his date of birth in numbers 5-3-68, while in a nod to hit film franchise Twilight, he also has the werewolf symbol which character Jacob, played by Taylor Lautner, has on his arm.

And while most England fans reached for the red and white face paint, a flag or a vuvuzela to trumpet the team's arrival in the World Cup in South Africa last year, Alan marked the event with something all together more permanent, a Three Lions tattoo on his left arm.

Yet still the family theme crops up, nearby is a poem dedicated to his dad. "There is a place in our hearts that cannot be filled. Rest in peace till we meet again."

Alan's mum also has a presence in the art work, in a simple carnation design – her favourite flower.

And next to it, on his right forearm, is cartoon character Taz, the names of his four youngest children, and a dagger with the wording "I live and die for the ones I love, family".

On his upper arm, space is already at a premium; a large dragon covers up an older

tattoo with its head precariously close to the head of another pin-up with the phrase "The wife made me do it."

Alan reckons his arms will be 'filled in' by Christmas as he continues to dream up new designs to complete his look.

"I'm not finished because I have still got space. It's something I have always wanted doing. I have my limits. I would have my neck done, but not my face."

"I'm having spider webs on my elbows and he (DK) can cover it with stars to make it link – whatever he thinks is best as long as you can't see any bit of skin."

"I would stop at my hands. I wouldn't have them fully done. I have still room on my legs and the backs of my legs."

"I have no regrets – I haven't regretted any of them and I won't regret any of them."

"My arms will be covered by the end of the year. I want eventually to be covered."

As his ambition to be fully inked grows the style of tattoo has changed too. "I use to go small, but I have big ones too."

"I want the kids' hand prints with their names on the left side of my stomach."

Kat agrees: "Big is the way to go. I will have more on my legs, they all have meaning, but I won't get completely covered."