

David Trevor Shutt

16 March 1942 – 30 October 2020

David was the son of Ruth and Eddie Shutt. His mother was a dressmaker and his father a builder, who built the house where he grew up in Farsley, near Leeds. Ruth was a Quaker who came into Quakers through the Pontefract Lane Friends Adult School. There was no meeting for worship at that time where they lived, so she and her son went to Carlton Hill Meeting, which David attended from when he was six or seven until his mid-teens. As a boy, he had a lovely sense of humour and loved singing, something that continued through his life. His father died in his mid-teens, so he left his education to train as an accountant, to help support the family.

It was also in his early teens when he became interested in politics and joined the Liberals. He remained a lifelong Liberal, standing for Parliament seven times in his later life. While he was never elected as an MP, he was made a life peer in 2000 and served as Spokesman for the Liberal Democrats on International Development and then Northern Ireland. Quakerism and liberalism together ran through his life like the warp and weft of a cloth. He met his wife Margaret, when they were 18, through the Young Liberals in Pudsey, and they married in 1965.

He made his living as an accountant, rising from the bottom to become a partner in a firm in Halifax, and became a member of Halifax Local Quaker Meeting. His work gave him a hard-nosed view of finance and how to manage money. This proved invaluable to the various bodies to which he committed his time outside of work. He joined the board of the Joseph Rowntree Social Services Trust – later known as the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust – in 1975, only stepping down in 2010 when he became deputy government chief whip in the House of Lords and had to leave the various bodies he was in. He was also a trustee of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) for 24 years from 1986. He was the only Quaker to serve on both trusts, sometimes acting as a bridge, never hesitating to ask the hard questions, always directly and always for the best possible reason. He was not intransigent in his views. Once he'd heard what everyone had to say, and felt this is something we need to do, his view was 'let's get on with it'. His discernment was very good. He had an enormous capacity to be approached by anybody and to approach anybody.

David did not wear his Quakerism on his sleeve but lived out his Quaker witness through the things he did and causes he supported and worked for, rather than in the local meetings, which he attended occasionally. As one friend said, if you are in difficulties, he'd help you out, would give you time, never seeking glory but to make a difference. He was blunt and outspoken. He brought some of his political nous to the Quaker world and some of the Quaker world to the political. He was a thoughtful and an immensely kind man who loved travel, plain food, railways, and Gilbert and Sullivan. While he was sometimes lonely in London, he was an active member of the House of Lords, as he felt it was his public duty and never avoided hard work, moving a motion to press for the automatic registration of 16 and 17 year-olds to vote in the House of Lords a few days before he died.

From childhood onwards he always had a sparkle in his eyes and was famous for his laugh, an infectious and abandoned kind of laugh. You always knew when he was in a room. He believed he was in the world to do something, to make the world a better place and never said 'I'm too old, too tired', but he'd say 'it has to be done'.

As the JRCT minute of record to his service noted, “David was clearly and proudly a Yorkshireman, succinct, plain speaking and independent of thought and expression. He often used this to good effect, puncturing verbosity, expressing down-to-earth scepticism, bringing a lively touch of humour to over-solemn proceedings. But these outward characteristics belied a sensitive, warm and generous nature, a passion for justice and democracy and an unwavering commitment to the causes he espoused. He believed in what he saw as the old-fashioned virtues of duty, service and sheer hard work.”

Through his work directly in politics and as a Calderdale councillor and mayor, and indirectly through the trusts and the activities they supported, David’s positive influence spread across a wide range of areas – from ensuring the survival of Cober Hill recreative, educational and Conference Centre to work on the Northern Ireland peace process; from the creation and development of the Community Foundation for Calderdale and Pennine Heritage locally to the Power Commission on democracy in Britain; the JRCT Visionaries for a Just and Peaceful World Project to the creation of Open Democracy, an independent global media organisation to educate citizens to challenge power and encourage democratic debate across the world; and so many more.

It was the values he absorbed as a child, as a Quaker, that inspired him to apply his talents for the good and seek to ensure the flowering of the talents for the good in others, as individuals or as organisations.

David was, to borrow a phrase from Martin Luther King, both tough-minded and tender-hearted. He was characterised by incisive thinking, realistic appraisal, and decisive judgement on issues of concern. He was both astute and discerning. But he was also tender-hearted, with kindness running through his approach to people and addressing his concerns.

He loved his wife and family, his daughter Christine and her husband Stephen and their children Imogen and Alexander, his son Richard and his wife Jackie and their daughters Francesca and Hannah, and his younger son Andrew and his wife Hannah and their daughters Esmae and Isabelle. He supported his wife in the Baptist Church to which she belonged, and its work. As one colleague said, he lived and breathed the values of the Quaker movement and was the best pal you could possibly have.

Signed on behalf of Brighouse West Yorkshire Area Meeting

Held on 13 March 2021