

OBITUARY

NEIL FITTON



5th February 1937- 18TH January 2016

Died peacefully in Chester on 18th January after a long period of illness, age 78.

Neil Fitton was originally from Oldham and lived the last 30 years of his life in Chester. He was Director of Education for Cheshire and retired in 1991 when he was awarded the CBE.

After retiring, Neil was actively involved in many Cheshire community groups, including:

- The Cheshire Wildlife Trust where he was Chief Executive from 1991-93, and later Chairman of their Education Committee.
- Supporting the disabled. Neil had contracted severe rheumatoid arthritis aged 40 and having worked on through the many difficulties this presented, he was anxious to see others do the same without discrimination. He chaired the Cheshire Committee for the Employment of Disabled People and was a member of its successor body, the North West Disability Advisory Group.
- Chester U3A (University of the Third Age), he organised study groups and was Vice Chairman then Chairman from 2004 to 2008.
- Trusteeships: he was a trustee of DIAL House, Chester and was one of the first non-executive directors of the Countess of Chester NHS Hospital Trust.

In retirement Neil also participated in local politics, as an elected member of Chester City Council from 1992 to 1996, and of Cheshire County Council from 1997 to 2001.

Throughout his working life, Neil was dedicated to the education sector. After he graduated and qualified as a teacher, he taught history at a large Bristol comprehensive for 6 years. He then moved into a new career in educational administration, working his way up to become Director of Education for Stockport and then for Cheshire.

As Director of Education for Cheshire he was involved in education initiatives and policy making at national level including:

- Chairman of the Association of Colleges of Further and Higher Education
- Founder member of the Schools Examination and Curriculum Authority
- Member of the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers

Neil took early retirement in 1991 and was awarded the CBE in that year's New Year's Honours list.

As well as a successful career in education, Neil had a lifelong interest in the theatre. When he was younger he acted in leading roles with Sale Nomads and other amateur dramatic groups in the Manchester area, and counted acting at The Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester as one of the finest experiences of his life. He not only acted but was also drawn to the creative side, writing several plays which were performed. One of them, a one act play "Conscience Stricken", was performed all over the country and won many awards at festivals.

Another lifelong interest for Neil was cricket, with the personal highlight of once playing cricket at Old Trafford. He played for Bristol & District and in his 30's captained Sale Cricket Club for three seasons. When he was in his 70s, Neil still proudly recalled his record as a Hulme Grammar School pupil - taking 125 wickets in two seasons, the highest on record for a spin bowler. He was an expert spin bowler until contracting rheumatoid arthritis age 40 and right to the end of his life, he avidly followed the test cricket scores on his laptop.

Originally Neil was from Oldham. His father was a carder in a cotton mill, and he worked there himself as an unskilled labourer while at school. He was always proud of his roots and vividly recalled the texture of life growing up in a cotton mill town. In his collection of poems published as "Bricks & Straw" with Oldham Metropolitan Borough, he wrote:

*"..you can't help but feel
a sympathy,
and a touch of pride yourself,
when there's a bit of cotton in your blood."*

Later in life, Neil entertained many community groups with a talk about life in Oldham in the 1940s and 50s.

Neil's brother Paul and two wives, Jean and Freda, have all predeceased him. He leaves a son, James, and a daughter, Helen, as well as two step-children, Avril and Douglas.