

In memory of Murray Stewart

We are all so sad that Murray Stewart died just before Christmas, aged 86. He will be sorely missed and our thoughts are very much with Di and all of their family.

Murray was an outstanding giant of a man, teasingly improving the lives of others and he threw his energy into so many aspects of life in the village and much more.

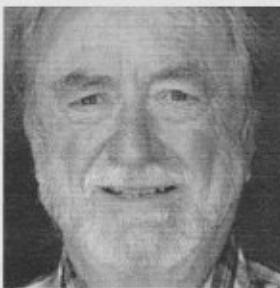
So where can one start? Murray and Di moved to Abbots Leigh in September 1995 and immersed themselves in everything in the village. A proud Scotsman, he set up a Scottish country dancing group. He was involved in preparing the village Millennium Record; he created the village archive; he was passionate about the history of the village, writing books on the subject and ran the local history society; he led the Archive Group of the Civic Society, over four years he mapped all the graves in the churchyard and made display boards as guides and also prepared the story behind all the names on the war memorial; he obtained a Heritage Lottery grant for the Parish Council to help restore Abbots Pool; he was on the Parish Council for 8 years; he was an active member of the Pill and District Community Land Trust trying to get some more affordable housing in Pill; he led the preparation of the Pill, Easton in Gordano and Abbots Leigh Neighbourhood Plan; he was involved with the Abbots Leigh Wildlife Group from the very beginning, being the treasurer; he was an active member of the Abbots Leigh Civic Society; he organised Burns Night suppers; and was a stalwart participant in the annual village litter pick, always going for the worst section down Weir Lane and back to the village.

Murray was a professor at Bristol University from 1974 to 1995, where he was Director of the School for Advanced Urban Studies and later Dean of the faculty of Social Sciences. In the mid-1990s he, with several colleagues, moved to the University of the West of England and established the Cities Research Unit. He took a particularly collaborative approach to his work, was known as a fantastic boss and was particularly supportive of younger and less experienced colleagues. He had little time for the rituals and status of the university, but was very engaged in research, ideas and debate about how urban environments work and how they might be made better for the people who live in them. He liked to see results and effect change. He was chair of the Bridge Foundation Charity. He was one of Quartet's vice-presidents and served as a trustee on their board and their national membership organisation, UK Community Foundations. He set up his family fund with his wife, Di, as part of the national matched giving Grassroots challenge in 2010, taking advantage through another national scheme in 2015 to boost his philanthropy. Through their fund, Murray and Di supported organisations that provided opportunities to disabled children, young people and their families across the West of England.

He did so much and Abbots Leigh will be a poorer place without him.

A Celebration of Murray's life will take place on Friday, March 20, at 2pm in Holy Trinity Church in Abbots Leigh followed by refreshments in The George.

Simon Talbot-Ponsonby



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