John Lightley: A Tribute

John Lightley and his wife, Margaret, died within days of each other in June 2020. Their contributions to Shincliffe life serve as a model for us all. Below is a tribute to John written by his son, Stephen.

John and his wife, Margaret, lived in Shincliffe from 1964 until they moved away in 2016. They were one of the first residents on Hill Meadows, the first of the new developments on the Bank Top. John was an agriculturalist, lecturing for a while at Houghall Agricultural College and later heading up the Agricultural Training Board in the north east of England.

John was a founder member of the Shincliffe Local History Society in 1998 and was Chairman from its inception for many years.

John’s family had their roots in the coal mining industry and John had a special interest in the village’s Aged Miners’ homes. Shincliffe colliery closed about 1900 and all the miners moved away. The houses were empty, and the Aged Miners Association bought about 80 of them and made them into Aged Miners’ homes. Shortly after the war in 1945, the houses had fallen into poor condition and were condemned. In his role as Chair of the Local History Society, John wrote a booklet on the history of the Shincliffe Aged Miners’ Housing Association.

John served on Shincliffe Parish Council from 1975 until 2015. He was Chairman from 1991 to 1997. He regarded his main achievement as preventing the sale of the site of the former Shincliffe Bank Top colliery, by then an attractive area of land that was home to many butterflies and wildlife, to property developers. The Parish Council wanted to buy it and preserve it as a piece of history, which they did. In so doing, they preserved a piece of historical and environmental heritage that remains in place today for the enjoyment of current and future village residents.

John was a member of Shincliffe Parochial Church Council from 1968 and Vice-Chairman from 1992 to 2013. He was churchwarden of Shincliffe Church from 1976 to 1989. In 1976, he, with others, set up an informal Social Committee for the Parochial Church Council. This Committee developed a programme of annual events in the village that, in the main, continue to today with annual garden parties and other regular social events.

After he retired at the age of 60, the Liberal Democrats wanted a candidate to stand for the Elvet ward, which included Shincliffe. John was elected as Councillor to Durham City Council in 1995 and was a councillor until 2009. He later stood for the County Council and was elected a County Councillor in 1997 and served until 2005. He came off the County Council when he was elected as Mayor of Durham for the year 2005-2006.

Alongside his career and public service, the Durham Light Infantry played a major part in his life. He served with the regiment in Korea and joined the Territorial Army after his national service was over. He went on to hold the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the Light Infantry.