

Obituary for Anthony Bottrall



Anthony Bottrall has died at the age of 76. His careers followed unpredictable and unconventional paths: first in the Foreign Office, then as an agricultural expert in 'overseas development' and lastly as Liberal Democrat Councillor in Lambeth. His work reflected his Christian faith and his commitment to the underprivileged with a special concern for children and young people. When responsible for education underachieving black boys attracted his particular attention.

Anthony's parents were literary, administrative and academic. His father was Ronald Bottrall (1906-1989), who was also a poet, but made his career in the British Council. His mother, Margaret Florence (1909-1996) was devout and scholarly, an expert on 17th Century English poetry, a Founder and Fellow of Lucy Cavendish College and a Tutor and Fellow of Hughes Hall, both in Cambridge. She also was an independent Councillor in rural Essex at one point. Anthony's early childhood was spent in Thaxted, Essex and abroad, mostly in Italy. It included five years in Rome. He remained bilingual in English and Italian until the end of his life. His parents divorced in 1953, his father remarrying and his mother remaining single.

A classical scholar at Winchester and at Magdalen College, Oxford, his education carried with it all the obvious advantages, albeit little mathematics and no science. He owed Oxford doubly in the sense that his livelihood was mostly earned as an agricultural economist. He had acquired a diploma in Agricultural Economics in Oxford after being disenchanted with the FCO which had sent him to the opposite part of the world, namely Indonesia, after he confessed being particularly interested in Eastern Europe- with Serbo-Croat and Russian in tow. In Indonesia he was victim of Anti-British riots in 1963 during Sukarno's time and ended up in Singapore. His desire to help develop the countries, in which he found himself, stems from that time.

His work in overseas development took him to the Lower Indus (Pakistan), Sudan, Indonesia, Taiwan and India. His speciality was comparative irrigation management. He later on joined the Ford Foundation in Dhaka, Bangladesh and in New Delhi, India. While overseeing a large number of projects in India, his duties also covered Nepal and Sri Lanka. Establishing himself as a free-lance consultant in the same field after returning to this country in 1990 he visited South India, Nepal, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Morocco.

Anthony married Ingeborg, daughter of Prof. Wilhelm Martin Johannes Oesch from Germany, in 1978. They met in Cambridge where his mother had taught English Literature. Their first child, daughter Ursula was born in London in 1981, the second, a son, Francis in 1983 in Germany and a third, Eleanor, in New Delhi, India in 1987. Raising the children in a variety of countries and settings occupied much of Ingeborg's time. Both she and Anthony together were involved in their children's education, particularly in India.

The initial readjustment for the family with three young children was very difficult. They moved back into their Victorian terrace house in Brixton, which Anthony had bought in a derelict state in 1972 as a bachelor. However, Anthony soon began to realize that some of the overseas experience could be

usefully applied in Lambeth, and stood as a successful Liberal Democrat candidate for Lambeth Council, serving from 1994-2006. Lambeth was then in crisis. At the time Stockwell, his ward was one of the poorest, with 65% of its inhabitants in social housing. He considered the estates in Stockwell, particularly the Studley estate, as his "field" and sorted out innumerable complaints by its inhabitants. He was universally respected by his constituents for the effective but unobtrusive way in which he helped. His fellow members in the Council recognised his integrity, commitment and serious, fair-minded approach.

His choice as Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Education was helped by the fact that all three children went to the Stockwell Infants and Junior School and that Ingeborg had been very involved in Lambeth Education as a parent governor. Anthony rose to the challenge, was good at cooperating with his Conservative and Labour colleagues during the hung Council (1994-98) a time which brought about fundamental changes for the better, then in opposition (1998-2002) and positively enjoyed being the Executive Member for Education during the Liberal Democratic/Conservative administration (2002-2006). This role involved getting to know the entire scene; seeing out one of the Directors of Education and being part of appointing new ones. The most productive period was 2003-2006 with Phyllis Dunipace as Director of Children's and Young People's Services.

He served with distinction as a school governor himself at two Lambeth primary schools, St. John's Angell Town and Allen Edwards, right up to the end of his life. He was involved in the Lambeth Governors' Forum and also responsible for appointing numerous governors in his capacity as Liberal Democrat spokesperson but did so in a non-partisan manner.

Always a gifted linguist he spoke French, German, Bengali and Urdu as well as those already mentioned. He joined a Portuguese class at Morley College in 2006, not only to promote better links with the growing Portuguese community in South London, but also in the process becoming highly proficient. He inspired enthusiasm in his last group of fellow students with his love of Portuguese poetry inherited from his father.

Anthony was proud at the end of his life of having had a significant part in the striking improvement of educational standard in Lambeth. In 1995 Ofsted declared that fourteen out of more than eighty schools in the borough required 'special measures'. By the time he lost his seat on the Council in 2006 not a single school remained in 'special measures'.

Anthony was very persevering in his pursuit of projects, not always in his own best interest. He tried to achieve a balance between the public and private by maintaining his recreations which included reading, cooking, entertaining, singing and listening to music. He was a generous and faithful husband and close to all three children.

Anthony Bottrall, diplomat (1962-67), agricultural expert with Huntings Technical Services (1968-72), the Overseas Development Institute (1972-82) and the Ford Foundation (1982-1990), freelance consultant (1991-94), Liberal Democrat Lambeth Councillor (1994-2006). Born in Florence, 15th May, 1938; died at Trinity Hospice, Clapham, of prostate cancer on the 16th of December, 2014. Survived by his wife, Ingeborg and their children, Ursula, Francis, Eleanor and Richard, his son-in-law.