

Les Strong
Feb 1940 – May 2026
SGS 1952 - 1958



Life could not have been more complete, and I was relatively lucky in enjoying relatively good health and fitness into my eighties.

I do not know when this information will be used at my funeral, and I hope not for a while yet. However, I hope it provides some useful information at the event.

15th August 2020.

My funeral wishes, and details about me

I want a humanist funeral.

I would like Vaughn Williams' Lark Ascending to be played at the service. I have the CD.

I enclose a photograph should one be required for the service sheet.

I would like my coffin to be removed before people leave the hall - not left for people to look at or touch as they leave.

My ashes are to remain at the crematorium - not taken away and scattered.

Notes on my life

Origin

Born 26th February 1940 at South Moor, a small mining town in County Durham.

My father was a fitter whom I didn't meet until I was 6 because he was serving in the 2nd World War. I had one brother, Brian who was 5 years older and who died in 2012. I lived at home until leaving for university in 1958. Once my parents had died, I returned to the North East once only to attend a 50th-year school reunion. This was a wonderful experience, meeting again people I had not seen in half a century.

Education and career

Entered Greenland Infants School in 1945, making some friendships that lasted for over 70 years. Entered Stanley Grammar School in 1952 and soon developed an interest in Science, studying biology, chemistry, and physics for A-level, for which I was awarded a State Scholarship.

Entered Sheffield University in 1958 to read Zoology, graduating with honours (2i) in 1961. My interest in insects led to research on the biology of plague locusts, gaining me a Ph.D. in 1964. I then spent 2 further years in Sheffield as a research fellow funded by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

In 1966 I moved to the University of Bristol as an assistant lecturer in Insect Biology in the Department of Zoology and remained there for the remainder of my working life, retiring as Senior Lecturer in 1999.

In recognition of my work in the field, I was appointed Editor of The Journal of Insect Biology in 1975, a position I held until retirement. On retirement, the journal published a special commemorative issue to honour my 25 years as editor.

Love of teaching

I loved teaching and gained considerable pleasure from giving good lectures; I felt I had succeeded when students gathered to ask interesting questions at the end of a lecture. At the same time, I was unhappy when I gave a poor lecture. Student questionnaires rated me the best lecturer in the department, and I was Chairman of Studies and Head of the Teaching Committee until retirement.

Sadly, I became increasingly disillusioned with the increasing amounts of tedious bureaucracy and endless assessments that disrupted, rather than improved, the quality of teaching. Students became units of income, while staff received recognition only for research output and obtaining grants. By 1999, I decided to take early retirement, and made a complete break from university life - a decision I have never regretted. I had been suffering from Ménière's Disease for several years.

Family

I met my wife Anne when she was Head of Department's secretary in the Zoology Department. We married after living together for 26 years, something our friends found amusing. We used to say that we did not want to rush into things! We spent 25 years in an old Victorian house in Clifton, Bristol, carrying out all kinds of DIY improvements when not working at the university. During one such work phase, while listening to The Food Programme on BBC radio 4, we were horrified to hear about treatments used routinely in meat production. This led up to becoming 'vegetarians', although we continued to eat some fish; we were what one of our friends called 'fish and chipocrates'.

While in that lovely old house, I developed (in my spare time) the skill of making and repairing leaded-glass panels for doors and windows. My reputation spread over the Clifton area where countless glass doors and windows were in a poor state. It was with great pride that we used to walk around the area and see my handiwork in various houses. Such activity came to an end when we moved to Berkeley and Thornbury where fewer people had stained glass.

We loved this old Clifton house, but when Anne took early retirement in 2004, we moved to our small cottage in Berkeley, which we had bought as a weekend retreat many years previously. However, Berkeley was too quiet, the cottage was very small, and we moved to Thornbury in 2008, living there ever since, another decision we never regretted. During our life together, Anne and I were a team; we did most things together, from projects in house and garden, to organising U3A walks and meetings.

I have two daughters, Jill and Kerry. Jill lives in France with two grandchildren: Alice and Django, while Kerry lives in Bude, Cornwall with a collection of animals.

I helped both daughters with work on their houses, Jill having an old farmhouse in France that required lots of rebuilding, and Kerry's house needed some alterations before she moved to Cornwall. While helping to refit her bathroom, I managed to cut my head on a jemmy, leaving pools of blood all over the floor, and returned home with a huge bandage around my head - just as well that Kerry was a paramedic.

Activities and interests

Even as a youngster in the NE, I loved being outdoors with my young friends from school and neighbouring houses. We spent hours in local fields and woods, never at a loose end for anything to do. I was a keen cyclist and entered in mass-start cycle races (Junior Category) but was not very good.

When I came to Bristol, I took up squash and became pretty good, playing in the local league for many years, in fact captaining the Bristol Hospitals team for much of this time. How I became to be captain of the hospitals team is too long to relate. Sadly I retired from squash when 55, because I feared a serious accident while still trying to be competitive! Although I took up golf at 55, I was too old to be any good, and I gave up when I realised I had more pressing things to do.

We had a massive allotment in Berkeley, producing almost enough vegetables to keep us in food for the entire year. As vegetarians, this was wonderful, and we always felt that we had remained healthy on account of our home produce. Sadly, when we moved to Thornbury, I had to give up my beloved allotment, and felt too old to begin again with a virgin bit of land.

Together with Anne, I developed an interest in Geology, attending a variety of field courses, both local and afar. This interest took us to The Outer Hebrides in 2005, and we returned every year up to 2014. In 2017 I started a Geology Group within the U3A and really enjoyed giving talks again. The group grew in strength and numbered over 30 by the time meetings stopped due to the Covid 19 outbreak. Sadly, at about the same time, my old illness (Ménière's Disease) returned after a remission of some 20 years. This caused me to step down from the Geology group.

As regular viewers of Inspector Montalbano on TV we developed an interest in Sicily, and visited the island three times. On one occasion we took a guided walk up Mt Etna, an experience I shall never forget. The volcano rumbled three times as we approached.

In 2007, I joined Thornbury Community Composting, helping to maintain the site on Saturdays and Wednesdays. I loved this outdoor activity and made lots of friends on the site - all retired like myself, but from a wide range of backgrounds. I was chairman of the group for three years. When the group was licensed to use the adjacent woodland for preparing and storing logs, I saw this as an opportunity to make use of a site that had been used as a tip for many years. Clearing away debris, piling dead wood into 'beetle banks', planting flowers, and tending the trees was a constant joy, as well as making a wood store from old crates. I retired from the group early in 2014.

In the summer of 2014, finding plenty of time on my hands, I became a volunteer in the Multiple Sclerosis Peoples Help shop in Thornbury. The enterprise expanded to take on a furniture business and I helped to clean, restore, repair, and sell the items donated to the shop. I qualified (online) to do PAT testing and ended up spending my time in the shop working with electrical gear. This was great fun and I enjoyed the camaraderie of the other volunteers.

Anne and I always shared a love of walking, and few days passed without going for a stroll. We were keen members of the U3A walking group where we met lots of wonderful friends, and with whom we spent many hours in and around the area. Sadly, the Ménière's Disease again curtailed this activity.

Me as a person

For me, life was about getting things done. I was never happier than when I was doing something manual. I could usually find something to do whether in the house, garden, compost site, MS shop, or at the homes of my daughters. I must have been a pain to work with, both in the university, and at home, because I was a perfectionist. This is something I inherited from my father. I always believed that if anything was worth doing, it was worth doing well. I detested bodging anything. If Anne wanted a lick of paint on a door, I had to rub it all down, prime, undercoat, then gloss - a lick was not an option. Planting anything in the garden usually meant massive earthworks, not just a simple hole in the ground.