

Sharon Ellis, 1946 to 2023
Past Member, Secretary, Chairperson and recent President
of the Lechlade Art Society

Sharon Rosemary Bray was born in Redhill on 25th February 1946. She attended Charlwood Primary School and went on to Reigate Grammar School for Girls. Discovering a love and talent for art, she then attended Reigate Art School for five years. Sharon found her first job, as a designer for Hamper and Purcell in High Holborn, by travelling to Charing Cross every Thursday to read the situations vacant columns in "Ad Weekly" before it appeared in the provinces.

Sharon married Steve Ellis in 1968 and they moved to East Peckham in Kent. Her artistic career took a surprising turn when she started a job at the Maidstone passport office and subsequently became the Kent area manager. They moved to Swindon when Steve was relocated by Hambro Life. Sharon had a brief spell selling ad space for a local paper but soon returned to her passion for art when she joined Hambro Life's Art Department.

After the breakup of her marriage, Sharon, alone with a toddler son, lived with her parents in Horley, Surrey, for six months. But, ever resilient, she soon returned to Swindon, bought a small home in Toothill and started a business as a freelance graphic designer from her bedroom. Very long working hours enabled Sharon to grow her fledgling business and move to The Lawns where there were well-regarded schools in close proximity. To supplement her income, and to guard against the unpredictability of self-employment, Sharon taught at an art school in the evening and delivered intelligence for a local newspaper network.

Sharon met Colin, a photographer who first approached her as a client, and they formed a successful partnership by amalgamating their respective businesses. A side venture of a race-driving school at Castle Combe was later added to the business and Sharon moved to a large cottage in Down Ampney.

Sharon was eternally grateful for the contribution which Colin made to her life, in particular by providing a positive male role model for her son and for the research he conducted regarding her mother Kitty's medical conditions, effectively giving Kitty an extra ten years of life to enjoy with Sharon.

With her son now independent, Sharon moved once more and met another Steve - and so followed more than 20 happy years together. Sharon was able to focus on her own fulfilment but adversity struck in 2001 when she received a diagnosis of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Even this did not diminish her irrepressible spirit and she steadfastly refused to surrender to the condition. With Steve's support and companionship, she underwent countless sessions of gruelling treatments often exploring pioneering new procedures. She was in remission on successive occasions and, during her many healthy and energetic periods, she enjoyed foreign trips, becoming a grandmother (twice), buying a succession of properties and cars, and embracing her lifelong passion for art by joining, and eventually becoming President of, the Lechlade Art Society.

From December 2022, Sharon's health rapidly declined as successive parts of her body started to fail her. With each new affliction, Sharon faced the challenges with her characteristic stoicism and simply adjusted the parameters of what her onward life would be. Whilst we can no longer enjoy her direct involvement in our lives, we can find comfort in knowing that she no longer suffers and her life-affirming influence endures through our collective memories of her.

Sharon's ashes were interred in Cricklade cemetery on 18th August 2023 and this tribute is based on the eulogy delivered by her son Jim.