

Obituary: Sir Stephen Oliver KC

Briefings



22 May 2024

With great sadness we learned of the death of Sir Stephen Oliver on 8 April at the age of 85.

Stephen had a distinguished tax career as a barrister and then as a leading Special Commissioner and Tax Tribunal judge. He was also a long-term supporter of the tax charities.

Stephen trained as a barrister. Called to the bar at Middle Temple in 1963, he joined Pump Court Tax Chambers in 1964 where he built a thriving revenue law practice. He was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1980 and became Head of Chambers in 1987. In 1989, he was appointed a Recorder; in 1991, a Circuit Judge; and in 1992, Presiding Special Commissioner for Income Tax and President of the VAT and Duties Tribunals. The Commissioners were replaced in 2009 by the Tax Tribunals, where he became President of the First-tier Tribunal. Stephen retired from that post in 2011, rejoining his chambers as a mediator.

Stephen was concerned as a Special Commissioner about how vulnerable people were treated under the law, which led to his becoming a trustee of TaxAid in 2006 and his long association with the tax charities. He remained an active supporter throughout his retirement.

Stephen was a lifelong enthusiast of classical music. He was a fine cellist, and a supporter of the London Sinfonietta and the Aldeburgh Festival. He was also an able golfer.

In his various roles, not least as Leading Special Commissioner, Stephen encountered people across the tax profession. As well as being a talented lawyer, he is remembered fondly for his open-minded approach and charming manner. He was a delight to work with.

Stephen is greatly missed by Dawn, his wife, Adam, Rosie and Becky, his children and by other family and friends. A celebration of his life will be held on 1 July.

Stephen Banyard