

Obituary: Maurice John Gifford OBE

Maurice John Gifford, a former NAIEA general secretary, was born on 3 May 1928 and died on 6 July 2016. Here his wife Jane reflects on his life

Maurice John Gifford was the first part-time paid general secretary of the National Association of Inspectors and Educational Advisors, a predecessor of Aspect, which merged with Prospect in 2012 and is now the union's Education and Children's Services group.

Maurice served from April 1984 until 1989, when he retired. In June 1990 he was awarded an OBE for his achievements in education.

He was born in Lakenheath, Suffolk, an only child, and at the age of two-and-a-half, he and his family moved to Hiptoft Farm near Wisbech St Mary, Cambridge. His father was a fruit farm foreman.

Starting school was delayed by a bout of rheumatic fever. Maurice remembered little of his early school career at Wisbech St Mary Church School other than being given a slate and chalk. He did, however, remember being kept in by Miss Whitlock, who made him learn a poem that included the line: "I wish I lived in a caravan with a horse to drive like a pedal man." It was a line he repeated frequently, and has been heard by all of the family.

In 1939 he went to Wisbech Grammar School, where his achievements included the Lower School Prize for Maths & Science, and his book of choice was *Military Science Today*. He also won school prize for Best School Certificate. He considered one of his significant achievements was that he never completed a cross-country run.

In 1945 he entered Goldsmiths College to train as a teacher. His mother was the driving force behind this decision and he regretted that he did not train to be an engineer.

He entered the RAF in 1947, where his main role was in officer selection in London. This went well, despite an attack of chickenpox in 1949, the same year he left the RAF.

He began a career in education in 1950, as assistant teacher at Pinkwell Primary School in Hayes, Middlesex. This was not his forte and after that he taught in secondary schools. In 1956 his studies led to the award of an external degree in physics and maths from London University.

He was not very enthusiastic about being a teacher and decided to become an education administrator, a career in which he achieved a great deal. A new role beckoned in 1959 when he became chief assistant to the borough education officer in Acton.

In April 1961 Maurice became assistant education officer in Wiltshire, then in 1964 deputy chief education officer in Wakefield.

In 1966 he moved to West Bromwich in the West Midlands as deputy chief education officer and was promoted nine months later to chief education officer.

In 1972 he moved to his second chief officer post in Richmond-on-Thames, and followed by his third in the newly created county of Hereford and Worcester in August 1974.

Maurice and Jane moved to Cambridgeshire, Jane as one of her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, and in April 1984 he became the first part-time paid general secretary of the NAIEA. When he retired in 1989 he and Jane moved to Somerset and in June 1990 he was awarded his OBE.

During retirement he made frequent trips to Portugal, as well as two trips to Australia. His passion for DIY continued as well as his love of a good bonfire.

Retirement also allowed him to pursue a lifelong love of trains. He became a volunteer on the West Somerset Railway, and of all the things he was proud of, becoming a signaller and then railway controller rated among the highest. He regretted that he could no longer work operationally on the railway once he was 70.

His last 12 months were increasingly challenging, especially the onset of macular disease, which caused significant sight impairment. He died in hospital of heart failure on 6 July 2016.