

# Tributes to 'talented and committed North Wales artist'

**TRIBUTES have been paid to a "talented and committed man" who had been at the centre of the art scene in North Wales for the past 30 years.**

Steve Brake, county arts officer for Denbighshire, died last week, aged 63.

He had a long and distinguished career in the art world and was very well known, both in North Wales and nationally.

He was educated at Wimbledon and St Martin's School of Art and undertook his postgraduate studies in arts administration at City University, London.

During his early artistic career Mr Brake worked as a technician for world-famous sculptor Sir Anthony Caro.

He moved to Wales in 1973 and joined the old Clwyd County Council in 1980 to establish the Clwyd Arts and Exhibition Service. He then went on to join Denbighshire as county arts officer in 1996.

Mr Brake was instrumental in many of the projects that have helped to develop the arts scene in the region over the past three decades, including the setting up of library arts centres across the counties of North East Wales.

He also established the Wales Portrait Award and set up Oriel at Clwyd Theatr Cymru, along with Y Capel gallery in Llangollen, which has hosted a number of exhibitions, including work by Sir Kyffin Williams.

David Phoenix, advisor for arts in schools in Denbighshire, who had known Mr Brake since they started working together at Wrexham Library Arts Centre in the late 1970s, paid tribute to his friend and colleague.

He said: "Steve was fantastically passionate about art. He has been the number one contact for artists in North Wales for years and years. If anyone wanted to be put in touch with an artist or sculptor, it was him that they went to.

"He really is a major loss to the art world and will be greatly missed by everyone who knew him. He was at the centre of art in North Wales for many years and he leaves behind a great legacy which people should remember him for."

One of the projects that Mr Brake is best known for is his work establishing an arts in healthcare practice across the whole of north Wales, providing both a public art commissioning service for new hospitals, a temporary exhibition programme and artist in residence programme for hospitals.

NWN Media's vice-chairman Nonna Woodward worked with Mr Brake on a project at the Shooting Star Unit at Wrexham Maelor Hospital.

She said: "Steve was quite a character and his enthusiasm for art was amazing. The project was more than just hanging paintings on walls, the art had to be grown into the walls and Steve was very adept at finding the right artists and bringing the best out of them."

Jonathan Le Vay started working at Oriel at what was then Theatr Clwyd, in 1991 where Mr Brake became his boss, but also his friend and mentor.

Jonathan noted that Mr Brake had worked with young people on the Hoxton Cafe Project, a youth project in London in the 1960s, and said this was a good illustration of Mr Brake's ability to interact with people from all ages and all walks of life.

He said: "I worked with him for 17 years and I learnt a lot from him during that time. In all areas of work Steve was a friend as well as a colleague."

Another of Mr Brake's colleagues, Ann Thomas, had worked with him since 1983 and emphasised the legacy that he leaves.

She said: "He pioneered art in hospitals and we now have a changing programme of exhibitions from professional artists.

"The library galleries are second to none. Steve was passionate about the arts and did everything in his power to have the arts, particularly visual art, wherever possible. He's the end of an era in many respects."

Mr Brake's funeral takes place today at 3pm at Coed Bell Cemetery in Gronant.

John Clifford Jones, former North Wales officer for the Arts Council of Wales, said: "In my view, history will judge that no other person has worked so hard in this part of the world to promote the visual arts and to nurture and support emerging and established artists. I know from my regular contact and partnership with him when I worked for North Wales Arts and subsequently for the Arts Council, that he worked tirelessly to bring the visual arts to every corner of the region, and in this context he was always prepared to assist and advise beyond the boundaries of his own employing authority. He was always brimming with new and exciting ideas but he also had the energy and the practical skills to put those ideas into operation. From my point of view as a non-specialist it was a pleasure to work with Steve because he never tried to blind me with science, though if necessary he could produce some stunning prose."



Alun Morgan, former chairman of the Trust, Prince Andrew and Steve Brake, artistic director of the Arts Project at the Shooting Star unit, with children of Ysgol Ruabon at the opening of the Shooting Star unit in 2005.