Lord Goodhart
Barrister, founding member of the SDP and Lib-Dem peer

Lord Goodhart, who has died aged 83, was an eminent barrister practising for many years at the Chancery Bar who then became a well-known figure in the Liberal Democrat Party.

William Howard Goodhart was born on January 18 1933, the middle of three sons of the academic lawyer Professor Arthur Goodhart, Hon KBE QC, each of whom became distinguished in their chosen fields. The eldest was Sir Philip Goodhart, the Conservative MP, and the youngest was the economist Professor Charles Goodhart.

Goodhart was educated at Eton College and did National Service as a 2nd lieutenant in the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry from 1951 to 1953, after which he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge. After graduation he went as a Harkness Fellow to Harvard Law School.

In 1957 he was called to the Bar by Lincoln's Inn (becoming a bencher of the Inn in 1986). Although he developed a successful Chancery practice, his powerful intellect was not matched by great eloquence, and thus his practice was based more on advisory work than advocacy in Court. He took Silk in 1979.

Goodhart was a founding member of the SDP in 1981, drafting the party constitution, and from then on politics became a predominant interest; in 1983 he was the party's candidate for Kensington.

After David Steel demanded the merger of the Liberal Party and the SDP following a disappointing showing for their alliance in the 1987 election, Goodhart was one of the Social Democrats who engineered the merger.

He stood twice more for Parliament, for Kensington again in 1988 (as the Social Democrat candidate facing a challenge from Dr David Owen's continuing SDP), and in 1992 for Oxford West and Abingdon.

Ennobled in 1989, Goodhart was created a life peer in 1997, becoming the Liberal Democrats' Shadow Lord Chancellor, a position he held until 2006.

He served on several bodies connected with the law, among them the Council of Legal Education (1986-92), and the Conveyancing Committee of the Law Commission (1987-89). In 1997 he became a member and subsequently chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

In Parliament he served on the House of Lords Committee on the EU, the Committee on Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform, and the Joint Committee on the Reform of the House of Lords.

In 1988 he joined the governing committee of Justice, the body which campaigns to correct miscarriages of justice, becoming in due course its chairman. He also served as a trustee of the charity Fair Trials Abroad between 2002 and 2006.

He retired from the House of Lords in 2015.

In 1966 he married Celia Herbert, a daughter of the 2nd Lord Hemingford, with whom he had a son and two daughters. As Celia Goodhart she became principal of Queen's College, Harley Street, during the 1990s and was also active in the Liberal Democrat cause, standing for Parliament, unsuccessfully, for Kettering in 1983 and in 1987.

The Goodharts loved entertaining and were generous hosts. Together they built Youlbury House on Boar's Hill outside Oxford, a fine, unusual building, clad externally in cedar wood, which had been designed by the architect Hal Moggridge, a brother-in-law of Celia's. The house is now listed by English Heritage.

Lord Goodhart’s wife and children survive him.

Lord Goodhart, born January 18 1933, died January 10 2017

Graham Tullet

Contrary to what was suggested by our obituary of April 13, Graham Tullet was a Major in the Abu Dhabi Defence Force, not a Lieutenant-Colonel, and commanded a squadron not a battalion. We are happy to clarify this.