REMEMBERING MAURICE

The funeral service for Maurice Ashford, church committee member and treasurer, was held at St. Paul’s on February 23rd. His sons, Daniel and Nicholas, and his step-son Miltiades, spoke about Maurice’s early life and career and gave insights into his personality and his way of looking at the world. It was known to many of us that Maurice’s way of thinking and problem solving was based on his love and knowledge of engineering but hearing that he, along with two brothers and a sister, had been born and brought up on a Somerset farm, helped explain his thoughtful and measured approach to life. His first car was an MG Midget, which he stripped down and rebuilt in a weekend but he was also interested in music and learnt to play the piano and the trombone, facing some not unexpected ragging from others on the school bus when accompanied by the latter instrument! Showing an aptitude for engineering and science from an early age it is not surprising that he later won a holiday in South Africa for being the best apprentice in foundry technology. His first job was with Rolls Royce Aero in Derby and he worked for companies manufacturing aerospace and automotive components for most of his life. Approached by the United Nations, he travelled widely to improve foundry technology and processes in Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Cyprus. Daniel, an engineer himself, acknowledged his father’s influence on his career path, work ethic and practical skills – a fitting tribute. Nicholas, too, whilst referring to Maurice’s prolonged absences from home due to work when he and Daniel were small, inherited his love of the English coastline and countryside and nature in general. He spoke of an adult relationship with Maurice that was one of mutual respect and empathy and often touched on the spiritual. Those of us who engaged in this type of conversation with Maurice immediately recognised his desire to question the human condition and his frustration that, unlike an engine, there were aspects of life that could not simply be ‘fixed’. But, in the words of Nicholas: “after his two divorces, retirement and meeting the love of his life Sybille ……my father was definitely on his own path of redemption.” It was after he retired, and in Athens, that Maurice, met Sybille and her teenage son and daughter. Miltiades Zeibekis, Maurice’s stepson, described the household projects they worked on and the lesson he learned from Maurice that “"you always start with the design and getting all the measurements; the shopping for materials and the actual construction is the easiest part" which led him, like Daniel, into the field of engineering. Maurice and Sybille toured Greece by car, visiting new places and playing rounds of golf wherever they could. Sybille’s cancer diagnosis and then her passing were, as Miltiades said, a terrible shock to all the family and it took Maurice several year to get over the devastation he felt – but, with help from the church, he began to find his feet again. These lines, from The Road not Taken and Desiderata, poems chosen by his sons, sum up Maurice’s approach to life, an approach that will be recognised by all who knew him:

*Two roads diverged in a wood …I took the one less traveled by and that has made all the difference.*

*Go placidly amid the noise and the haste …. be on good terms with all persons …keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time*.