

## ***Sermon given by Rev Malcolm Wieck at the funeral of Michael Jones***

*10 May 2018*

It is wonderful to see so many people here this afternoon each remembering our friend Michael in their own way. Thank you.

It would be a truism to say that he touched the lives of us all, some no doubt extensively and frequently, others more transient. But, in whatever way, I suspect that we would all remember him as a caring and considerate man. Yes, he could take a view on something and express it forcefully; but there was no obvious “side” to him and he accepted, for example, a lost argument gracefully.

His interests were wide and far reaching but with an emphasis on local, district and countywide affairs and of course with this church in many and varied ways. Much of what I am going to say has been culled from the copious notes that he left in anticipation of this day. The difficulty though that I have is in deciding what to include and what to leave out! But I hope that what I have decided to say will give an overview of the man who over the last 40 years I was able to count as a true friend.

Michael was brought up during the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW and the somewhat grim post war years in suburban Harrow with his younger brother Mervyn. His parents were teachers – he describes them as ‘fond parents’ not only managing the family but also caring for the children they taught.

The masculine influence of Harrow boy’s grammar school, of boy scouts and then school cadet corps led him to an army career initially in the Infantry. However his first trip to Salisbury Plain and there digging a slit trench in solid chalk and living in it for 7 days quickly disabused him of a life in the Infantry, and that such total discomfort could in future be avoided by the prospect of riding with the Royal Artillery. Nonetheless soldiering in the Cold War years was routine and not exciting and although promoted early to Lt Col he felt that not having married he was unsuited to take command of a regiment with its families. He did 2 tours in Germany , during one of which he was confirmed, and spent the rest of his army career at the MOD in London.

Bonshommes Cottage, Michael's house here in Edington, was purchased in 1971 and was a bolt-hole for him during the last 6 years of his army career. It was the only home he ever owned and he was attracted to Edington by its annual Music Festival. He relished the new life he had found here with its church and community, home and garden.

He speaks of 2 or 3 years of some rather dull post army employments which took him away to Bedfordshire each week. In addition there was the support for his parents whose eventual deaths brought a greater focus for his life here. And it is that life which will be more familiar to us all.

He has described himself as a churchman, administrator, competent chairman, occasionally a leader, but generally a contributor to community life: 30 years as a Parish Councillor, 20 years District Councillor for Edington, Bratton and Coulston; trustee, then Chairman of Community First; an active member of the Wiltshire Assoc. of Local Councils; a Best Kept Village Competition Judge. He was clearly delighted that, as a district councillor, he had been able to support 2 small developments of social housing for rent in Edington and Bratton.

But I think, for most of us, our immediate memories will be of his involvement with this lovely church. A committed Christian, conventional and an advocate of the C of E parish structure, he was much influenced by Canon Ralph Dudley's enthusiasm for the liturgy and beauty of this building. He was a server for many years, secretary of the Friends until 1986 when he became Churchwarden giving lay leadership with his co Churchwardens for 11 years with 2 interregnums, one lasting for 20 long months while the benefice link with Bratton was created; instrumental in the report *A vision for a Decade* for the church as part of the new benefice. His role as Churchwarden was followed by the lead responsibility for the care of the fabric of this church and its finance. On Feast days and Festivals he was the hoister of the flag at the top of the tower. Eventually after 28 years he retired from most of these responsibilities and much appreciated being appointed Churchwarden Emeritus.

He was the manager cum caretaker of the Parish Hall for 17 years until 1998 but continued to maintain its grass area. That included the gradual eradication of Japanese Knotweed that had been planted by a 19<sup>th</sup> century vicar and had spread from the Old Vicarage garden.

Although Michael denied any personal musicianship, he appreciated good music especially choral and particularly that of Cathedral choirs. This he was able to indulge in the music and liturgy of the Music Festival and about which he was a fount of information to visiting clergy. And he would regularly give guided tours of the church. His massive knowledge of the ins and outs of the running of the church will be sorely missed.

He valued his relationships with his brother Mervyn and Denise and his 5 Godchildren, but regretted never having generated his own family. In his later years, having completed his stints as Parish and District Councillor, he found an additional focus in pastoral care where those attributes of being caring and considerate benefitted a number of people.

Michael's was a practical Christian faith and what can be more practical than the love, care and compassion for a neighbour? And it was that neighbourly pastoral care that Michael evinced over the years that struck me as making the man. But yes, he was practical too in the way that he cared for and loved this church building. And his practicality extended to the instructions for this service. Not only have I drawn from his own notes of his life, but this service, the format of it, was written out in detail. This is his service and the only alterations - no, the only additions - were to add the poem that Pat read out and the choir pieces. They are in a sense our tribute, our contribution to his service. He had given no instructions about the opening music but I understand that he had a great love of Schubert and some of you may well have recognised the piece played by John our organist at the very start of the service.

The Bible reading was Michael's choice, not only so appropriate for a Christian funeral, but particularly so for today as we celebrate our Lord Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven, preparing a place for his friend Michael. And that was Michael's conviction: that his Christian life here on earth, in the here and now would become a new and eternal life with his Lord and Saviour Jesus the Christ in his heavenly kingdom.

Yes, his was a practical faith but underlying it was his love of and desire to worship, praise and give honour and glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the days following Michael's death, in speaking of him to others, I referred to him as having been a rock within our church community. And that

inevitably reminded me of Peter, Jesus' disciple who would become, with all his faults, the rock on which Jesus would build his church. The traditional view is that Peter wrote the letters that bear his name in the Canon of scripture.

Michael's own epitaph that he has chosen for the Memorial stone where his ashes will in due course be laid is: 'Soldier, Councillor, Churchman', which he believes is a simple statement that, and I quote: 'well sums up the man who led an otherwise unremarkable life'. You can draw your own conclusion on that! But the epitaph that speaks to me, and I hope you will agree, is from Peter's first letter Ch 1 vv 3-9:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Michael, you are indeed receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your soul.

Alleluia. Amen.