

Maurice Ash

Maurice Ash (1917-2003) was a farmer, a writer and an administrator. Maurice took a degree in economics at LSE in 1938, but his real education was on active service in the Western Desert, Italy and Greece during World War II. While at university he met Michael Young, later Lord Young of Dartington, who recommended Maurice to write a report on the multifaceted aspects of Dartington Hall. This was where he met Ruth Elmhirst, daughter of Leonard and Dorothy, the founders of the Dartington Hall Trust, whom he married in 1947.

Maurice and Ruth farmed in Essex for many years before moving back to Devon with their young family, purchasing the Sharpham Estate in 1962. Their daughters attended the progressive school at Dartington. The Ash family set about developing the Sharpham Estate as a rural community and adding value to farming products by turning the Jersey cows' milk into cheese, as well as planting a vineyard and making the grapes into quality English wine.

In the early 1980s, Ruth and Maurice founded The Sharpham Trust as a charity, which had as its basis a marrying of Eastern and Western philosophy. Maurice was much influenced by Wittgenstein and Buddhism. The Sharpham Trust was tasked with caring for Sharpham House and Estate and taking forward Maurice and Ruth's passions including the arts, Buddhism, conservation and rural regeneration.

Amongst many activities, Maurice was chairman of both the Town and Country Planning Association and the Dartington Hall Trust. He was a founding member of Green Alliance and of the Henry Moore Foundation, co-founder of Schumacher College at Dartington and a supporter of Resurgence magazine from its inception. He was a patron of the Polish artist Zdzislaw Ruzskowski, many of whose works adorn the walls of Sharpham House.

Following Ruth's death in 1986, Maurice taught himself to cook and had a few signature dishes for which he was renowned. These included his roast chicken with chips made in a chip fryer, and banana custard. One of his daily pleasures was walking through Totnes to buy his food, with his French rush basket in hand and often with a bevy of children trailing behind him.

Maurice actively enjoyed his grandchildren and regularly provided a taxi service for them. When not at Sharpham, he spent long periods in Antibes in the South of France, where family and friends would descend on him in the summer. He spoke fluent French and on more than one occasion was mistaken as a local.

The legacy of Maurice and Ruth lives on through the work of The Sharpham Trust and its mission to build a more mindful, compassionate and environmentally-sustainable world.

If you'd like to support the work of The Sharpham Trust, there are ways to give to us, either through one-off donations, monthly gifting or by leaving a legacy.

Contact Programme Manager Ben Ballard on programme@sharphamtrust.org to find out how to help.

Visit us here: www.sharphamtrust.org

   SharphamTrust

