

8 January

FR JAMES FITZSIMONS

26 May 1919 - 8 January 2015



‘Fitz’, as he was known, was born in Litherland, in Lancashire in England and joined the Society, aged 16, in 1935. The war found him teaching Latin and Greek at Corby Hall in Sunderland and he remembers a landmine exploding on the football field. It caused considerable damage but the record says nothing of loss of life.

He liked to recall the sensitivity of Martin D’Arcy, Master of Champion Hall, Oxford, when his ‘Greats’ results came through: an Upper Second. He told D’Arcy, who first asked him, ‘Are you pleased?’ ‘Delighted’, was Fitz’s reply. ‘Then I too am delighted’, said D’Arcy.

He came to Southern Rhodesia in 1954 and taught at St George’s for nine years before being transferred to the newly opened St Ignatius’ College, where he remained for eleven years. The boys there called him *huku* (chicken) because he walked so fast. He was Prefect of Studies and would spend the while night before the term began arranging the time-table

In 1975, Fitz went to South Africa where he remained for the rest of his life. It was a second career as he now devoted himself to the Spiritual Exercises and work in parishes, chaplaincy with the Carmelite sisters, writing and giving conferences. He worked with Jack Gillick at Fons Vitae for some years. This was an institute that trained sisters in the main ideas of Vatican II and he introduced them to Ignatian Spirituality. Over its lifetime, Fons Vitae trained about 800 sisters. He was known for his clarity and the solid content of what he said. The Regional Superior could rely on him for help in drafting weighty letters. Later as parish priest of Braamfontein, he prepared the liturgy and his sermons very thoroughly.

Fitz was involved, with Annemarie Paulin-Campbell, in founding the Centre for Ignatian Spirituality which was later subsumed into the Jesuit Institute of South Africa. Fitz provided a manuscript, *Notes for a Theology of the Exercises* which were much appreciated. He wrote a lot on spirituality and poetry about spirituality, for example, a series of sonnets on every line of the *Anima Christi*. He also translated into English a Latin history of Gonçalo da Silveira, the first Jesuit in this part of the world.

He was a determined person with an active and searching mind. And he guarded his time – and his space - carefully. With regard to space, when the sisters tried to find a way into his flat to clean it, he found a way of warding them off!

David Dryden remembers him as also a keen golfer and squash player. He would stay up well into the night to watch golf finals on the TV.

The writer of this brief life knew Fitz in the 1960s and he was then said to be frail and had had part of his stomach removed, which necessitated special food. But that was fifty years before his death!