

14 January

Fr FRANCIS BARR

27 April 1909 – 14 January 1992



Frank Barr could be a forbidding presence but those who came to know him well speak of his great kindness. Born in Liverpool he went to the city's Jesuit school, St Francis Xavier's, and entered the novitiate in 1926, aged 17. He did his regency at Kutama in 1935 and after theology in the UK returned to the country in 1941. He served in pastoral work and teaching in a succession of places for between two and seven years: Makumbe, the Seminary, Monte Cassino, St Peter's Mbare, Archbishop's House (as Archbishop's secretary), Musami and Emerald Hill.

At Musami, Frank replaced Edward Hancko who left suddenly in an emergency. He soon found the job was beyond him and asked to be relieved immediately. Mark Hackett was summoned from his tertianship in the Congo to take his place but asked him to stay on as a teacher until he could be replaced. He did so happily for a couple of years. When he was education secretary for the archdiocese part of his work was to inspect the teaching of RE in our schools. He had a reputation for strictness and many a sister 'quaked with fear' when he was coming to inspect her class! Sr. Dominica refused to let him inspect hers! To his credit he took it well and Mark Hackett, who knew him well in those days, suspects he reformed his ways a bit. His strictness extended to the interpretation of the liturgy. When Loretto School for the Deaf moved to Emerald Hill, there was not enough room for everyone in the chapel and the sisters asked if the little ones could be on the sanctuary for a while. Frank's response was to consult the rules and he came back to say they could – provided they were boys! The sisters won that round because they simply got all the children to dress in their (identical) track suits and smuggled in the girls with the boys. He did not seem to notice.

Once during recreation at Musami, Mark Hackett was present when Frank mentioned he had a moth in his ear. 'We asked him whether it was trying to get in or out of his head! He took it very well, so he was really not as severe as was made out.' But he was a tense man and came out in boils when he felt he was being asked to do too much. He also developed a throat problem that prevented him swallowing. Operations were only partially successful and in his last 15 years 'he hardly had a decent meal.' He wrote a much-appreciated biography of Archbishop Chichester which describes the great man's achievements while also mentioning some occasions 'when Chic was wrong.' One, Frank does not mention, is the archbishop's failure to challenge the racial legislation which was enacted in the 1920s and '30s and which eventually led to a bitter war with huge loss of life.

He had a hobby of collecting postage stamps and added to the collections others in the province had made before him. They were all neatly preserved in albums with the idea they would eventually be valuable and contribute to the mission's finances. But they were sold by a Jesuit who almost gave them away, he got so little for them.

Frank was dearly loved by the children and the Dominican community at Emerald Hill and they expressed this at his funeral. There was also a Mass at Jesuit Missions in London for Frank's family in the UK, meticulously prepared by Tony Montfort, the director of JM at the time.