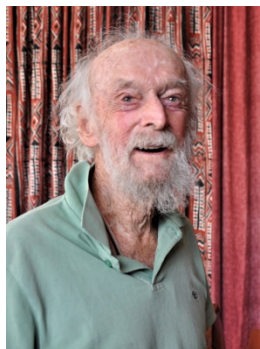


17 January



## **Fr ANTHONY WATSHAM**

30 April 1924 - 17 January 2019

Anthony Watsham spent his last days at St Ignatius College, Chishawasha, where he had earlier taught for 28 years. He is remembered with affection by a number of Mozambican novices whom he helped learn English while also endearing himself to them with his jokes and cheerful ways. Anthony ('Seamus') Watsham was born in Aylesbury in the UK and on finishing school joined a firm of architects. He was called up to serve in the war where he was in the Royal Air Force, mainly in India, where he had to interpret aerial photographs and produce 3-D models for the briefing of pilots. It was then that he met the Jesuits in Patna and became a Catholic. He entered the noviceship in London in 1947 with thirty others. One who knew him then spoke of his being 'someone at ease with himself, quietly getting on with his life, with a genial goodwill to all and quick to see the funny side of life. His quirky, somewhat surreal, sense of humour was already in evidence'.

During regency Tony was asked to teach machine drawing and metal work. The teacher he was meant to help left and Tony found himself in charge. He went to night classes to learn metal work and managed to make a silver chalice before returning to Heythrop for theology in 1955. Like many in those days he was unimpressed by the studies and took up bee-keeping and used his artistic talents in painting stage scenery. In 1960, Tony sailed for Africa expecting to go to Salisbury (Harare) but on arrival in Cape Town he was told to go to St Aidan's to replace Fr Peter Morris who had died in a motorcycle accident. Michael Lewis tells us 'Seamus, (the Irish for 'James', a name Tony quickly acquired when he vehemently denied he was Irish!) was asked to teach us geography, but he had to work it up. He was a superb teacher. His holidays (when not preaching retreats or travelling around the country - he once cycled the 800kms from Port Alfred to Cape Town) were spent constructing models from contour maps.'

Mike continues, 'He was soon asked to teach biology, which he did with passion, and he developed a love of the African bush. Again, he knew very little about biology and less about the wild, but learnt quickly and taught the subject to many pupils who went on to great things. He was his parents' only child and when I met them in 1967 at their home, they clearly did not understand what their son was doing.'

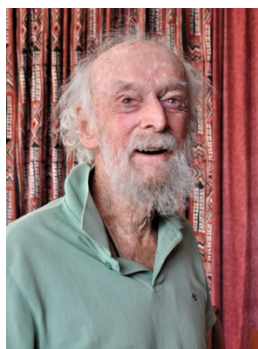
In 1967, Tony moved to St Ignatius College, Chishawasha, again to replace a priest who had died suddenly, Norman Dennis. Again, he was to teach biology. His interest in insects dates from this time and in November 1970 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society. He told the Superior, 'There is of course nothing meritorious about it, but it will be a very useful contact.' And it was. Tony spent a sabbatical in the British Museum in London and went on to build up a big collection of the parasitic wasps of Zimbabwe. He had a whole genus and several species of them named after him and a book of his drawings of Chalcid Wasps was published in 1995. He became a respected and widely acknowledged entomologist.

Tony established a small zoo at St Ignatius and Michael Lewis wrote: 'We must look at Tony Watsham's relationship to animals. I have this image of Tony arriving in heaven and rushing to meet all the animals he knew. He had the gift of being able to communicate with them with patience and gentleness. Tony was capable of great intimacy and affection, but at the same time incapable of showing it except to and through his animals; they helped him to relate to God and God's people more effectively.' Architect, teacher and entomologist, he was also an artist and did much of the interior decoration of the new school chapel at St Ignatius: the crucifix, our Lady and St John, the tabernacle and the panels on the stairs leading to the gallery.

Retiring from the classroom in 1995 he went as chaplain to the Precious Blood Sisters' novitiate in Macheke. There he continued with his drawings of insects and butterflies and walked his dogs in the woods. Finally, he returned to St Ignatius where he became a familiar figure, in shorts and flowing beard. At the funeral Mass, Sr. Cynthia Mgwena said: 'Go well dear, beloved Fr Watsham. You lived life to the full, a great, exceptional man, in your simplicity, humility and strange ways of expression and way of life.' Michael Lewis said: 'Tony was the most influential person in my life, in a very understated and unobtrusive way. As we all know, he was an extraordinarily talented, unconventional, and humorous Jesuit. But in case we think he was all sugar and sweetness: he was exceedingly stubborn, self-willed, and single-minded! He had a strong tongue, and his criticisms were accurate and biting, particular of those who were pompous and self-regarding. He was exceedingly annoying when it came looking after his health: when going deaf and blind he refused specialist help maintaining that it was a natural process of ageing to lose one's faculties. However, he could be quite selective in his hearing and used his disabilities to humorous effect by intentionally mishearing and then making a comment.'

01. 17. 2019

## ANTHONY WATSHAM 1924-2019



Anthony Watsham spent his last days at St Ignatius College, Chishawasha, where he had earlier taught for 28 years. He is remembered with affection by a number of Mozambican novices whom he helped learn English while also endearing himself to them with his jokes and cheerful ways. Brian Enright has put together an account of his life:

I first saw Tony Watsham in September 1953 at the opening of a new school year at St Ignatius College, London. The whole school was present and among the staff there was a new face. Tony in the then standard black gown and white collar looking rather surprised, almost startled. ‘How did I get here?’, he seemed to be saying. It was a look I was to get to know well over the next sixty-four years.

Anthony (“Seamus”) Watsham was born in Aylesbury and on finishing school joined a firm of architects but was called up to serve in the war three years later. He was in the Royal Air Force, mainly in India, where his artistic and graphic skills were put to good use. He had to interpret aerial photographs and produce 3-D models for the briefing of pilots. It was then that he met the Jesuits in Patna and became a Catholic. After the war he thought about becoming a Benedictine, but eventually settled on the Jesuits.

He entered the noviceship in London in 1947 with thirty others, many of whom had also served in the war. Michael Bossy, the only survivor of that group, writes: ‘Though Tony was only 23 at the time, we thought of him as very senior. I remember him as someone at ease with himself, quietly getting on with his life, with a genial goodwill to all the rest of us, quick to see the funny side of life in the novitiate, yet quite at home. His quirky, somewhat surreal sense of humour was already in evidence then’.

The name “Seamus” was acquired early on. It seems he once told a gathering of scholastics, “I am *not* Irish” and so they immediately called him “Seamus” - the Irish for James! During regency Tony was asked to help in the technical department, teaching machine drawing and metal work. The teacher he was meant to help left the following term and Tony found himself in charge. His years with architects helped with the drawing, but metal work was a challenge. He went to night classes, enrolled with City and Guilds, and managed to make a fine silver chalice before returning to Heythrop for theology in 1955. He was ordained in 1958. Like many others in those days he was unimpressed by the studies and took up bee-keeping and used his artistic talents in painting stage scenery. In 1960 Tony sailed for Africa with five others. He expected to go to Salisbury (Harare) but on arrival in Cape Town he was told to continue on to Port Elizabeth as he was to go to St Aidan’s. He was to replace Fr Peter Morris who had died in a motorcycle accident the previous week. Michael Lewis, a life-long friend of Tony’s, was at St Aidan’s at the time and writes:

“Tony was asked to teach geography, again something he had to work up. He was a superb teacher. He taught us to use different colours in writing up our notes, a technique I still use today, more than 55 years later. He learnt South African geography quickly, and his holidays (when not preaching retreats or travelling around the country - he once rode by bicycle from Port Alfred to Cape Town, some 800kms) were spent constructing models from contour maps and

other visual aids to help us understand the use of contours on maps. He was soon asked to teach biology, which he did with passion, and he developed a love of the African bush. Again, he knew very little about biology and less about the wild, but learnt quickly and taught the subject to many pupils who went on to great things. He was his parents' only child and when I met them in 1967 at their home they clearly did not understand what their son was doing.

In 1967 Tony moved to St Ignatius College, Chishawasha. Once again, he was to replace a priest who had died suddenly, Fr Norman Dennis. Again, he was to teach biology. His interest in insects dates from this time and in November 1970 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society. Writing to the Superior, telling him the news, he wrote, "There is of course nothing meritorious about it, but it will be a very useful contact." And so it proved to be. Tony spent a sabbatical in the British Museum in London and went on to build up a big collection of the parasitic wasps of Zimbabwe. He had a whole genus and several species of them named after him and a book of his drawings of Chalcid Wasps was published in 1995. He became a respected and widely acknowledged entomologist.

In those days, biology students had to dissect rats and rabbits as part of their course, and the biology teacher was expected to provide these. Tony did that, but also established a small zoo: insects and animals were important for him. Michael Lewis wrote: 'We must look at Tony Watsham's relationship to animals, because it gives us a clue to his relationship to God and to people. I have this image of Tony arriving in heaven. Most people will want to meet their relatives and friends, but for Tony there will be a rush of animals instead; a guinea-pig, a vervet monkey from St Aidan's, a genet cat called Cat, a warthog called Pig, a baboon called Bibiana (bought as a baby for two-and-six-pence and a tin of condensed milk on the feast of St Bibiana at Marymount in 1967), a big black dog called Dog, and another dog, a Dalmatian, called Iwe (to the surprise of many), a variety of birds and many others. He had the gift of being able to communicate with animals with patience and gentleness. Tony was capable of great intimacy and affection, but at the same time incapable of showing it except to and through his animals; they helped him to relate to God and God's people more effectively.'

During his twenty-eight years of teaching, Tony, as an architect, assisted in the continuous building at the college. And when the time came to build the school chapel Tony the artist not only helped with the plans but also did much of the interior decoration: the crucifix, our Lady and St John, the tabernacle, the panels on the stairs leading to the gallery are all his work. He served as Rector of St Ignatius for a brief period, 1989-92.

Retiring from the classroom in 1995 he went to Macheke as chaplain to the Precious Blood Sisters' novitiate. The sisters got used to his ways - and his dogs. Tony provided Mass for them and celebrated Sunday Mass in the local parish. He continued with his drawings of insects and butterflies and walked his dogs in the woods until 2015 when he retired again.

Sr. Cynthia Mgwena spoke at the funeral Mass: "Go well dear, beloved Fr Watsham. He lived his life to the fullest. He had accepted and known the love of God, he was ready to die. I stand here in gratitude and thanksgiving to God, for the gift of Fr Watsham in our lives. He was a great, exceptional man, in his simplicity, humility and strange ways of expression and way of life. He never missed celebrating Mass for us even when he was not well. He would pull himself to the chapel. He had a special place in his heart for the novices. He loved them and they loved him dearly and took care of him. As novices we looked forward to having lunch with him on Sundays; he would be very happy, talk loudly, joke and laugh but when the senior sisters were

around, he would not utter a word! He never called us by our names – did he even know them? - but by description: the light one, the dark one, the tall one, the short one, the thin one ... He was very alert and observant, he would sit by the sacristy door and watch us enter the chapel. Later he would comment on our dress and our shoes. To be a friend of Fr Watsham, you had to be a friend to his dogs; novices who did not understand this were likely to have the dogs sent to chase them. We will dearly miss you Fr Anthony; we bid you farewell today, but we remember the good old days, the jokes, laughter and life we shared together.”

After Macheke, Tony returned to St Ignatius where he quickly became a familiar figure, in shorts and flowing beard, walking with his dogs and working in the woods. He was also happy to celebrate Mass each day for the sisters at Mary Ward House. Although he was now quite deaf and his sight was failing, he steadfastly refused to consider a move to Richartz House. But when he became seriously ill he was brought there and was quickly transferred to hospital. He died two days later, in the presence of the Provincial, Fr Chiedza Chimhanda, and Socius and attended by doctors, including some he had taught. He was just three months short of his ninety-fifth birthday, the oldest man in the Province.

There was a vigil Mass at the Church of Our Lady of the Wayside, Mount Pleasant on Friday evening. Fr Roland von Nidda gave the homily. Tony, he said, exemplified the three pillars of Ignatian spirituality; he was a man of faith, well able to find God in all things, who experienced consolation. Roland ended, “The last time I saw him was when he attended our Province Assembly a couple of weeks ago. He was sitting next to David Harold-Barry and couldn’t understand a word the speakers were saying. He would ask David in a loud voice for all to hear: “What’s he going on about?” “Is he talking any sense?” And at the end of the Assembly when Chiedza Chimhanda thanked him for having come to the Assembly and having persevered for two whole days, he loudly asked David: “What’s he saying?” “He’s thanking you”, answered David. “Whatever for? What have I done?”

At the funeral Mass the next day Michael Lewis gave the homily: “Tony touched many people’s lives and directed them towards God. He was the most influential person in my life, in a very understated and unobtrusive way. He never spoke to me of a Jesuit vocation and when I decided to join the Society his only comment was, ‘Oh well, you had better go and talk to the Mission Superior’. I have a collection of his letters written every week over thirty years, which only stopped with the advent of cheap phone calls and his deteriorating eye sight. These letters described his daily life with little emotion and always ended simply ‘Yours. . .’

“As we all know, he was an extraordinarily talented, unconventional, and humorous Jesuit. But just in case we think he was all sugar and sweetness: he was exceedingly stubborn, self-willed, and single-minded, as many of his Superiors will have experienced. He had a strong tongue, and his criticisms were accurate and biting, particular of those who were pompous and self-regarding. All those who visited him saw that his rooms were usually more of a combination of a laboratory and a zoo than living rooms. He was exceedingly annoying when it came looking after his health: when going deaf and blind he refused specialist help maintaining that it was a natural process of ageing to lose one’s faculties. However, he could be quite selective in his hearing and sight, and could use his disabilities to humorous effect by intentionally mishearing and then making a funny rejoinder.”

May he rest in peace!