

26 January

Fr PHILIP PRIME

28 May 1910 – 26 January 1965



Percy, as Philip Prime was known, was born in Totnes in Devon in the SW of England. He shone at Stonyhurst in academics but sport, compulsory in those days, was torture to him. He achieved a ‘First’ in Oxford where he read history.

He returned to Stonyhurst to teach and felt he should show an interest in sport but he failed and gave up trying. He moved to South Africa in 1956 and taught at St Aidan’s. ‘He was an outstanding history teacher,’ according to David Dryden, though he ‘resorted to some “shady tactics” to get the boys to work at history. One boy, who did not like history was inveigled to do it by having his first essay highly praised in front of the whole class even though it was of poor quality, as emerged when virtually the same essay many months later was given a poor mark. But Percy’s career was cut short by a brain tumour. He seemed to have a premonition of his death for they said he had prepared things so that his teaching could be easily taken over when he went into his final days in Port Elizabeth.’

He had been in demand as a lecturer outside the college which suggests that tertiary, rather than secondary, education might have been where he would have flourished more.

Percy appeared to enjoy reaching beyond the school and liked to visit the parents of Jesuits both in the UK, when on leave, and in South Africa.

He trained the senior boys to teach catechism to the local people in the ‘locations’ around Grahamstown. Mark Hackett remembers that one of the members of the St. Aidan's community tended to be somewhat critical of others in his speech. Percy stopped him dead by observing that he was just like that himself!

But he struggled with Vatican II for reasons that are not quite clear.

Philip Prime had a deep appreciation of the Society and its ways and loved St Aidan’s as the place where the Zambezi Mission to the interior began. He would visit the graves of Weld, Schonberg Kerr and others there and he was the first to put some order in the archives at St Aidan’s.