

26 January

Fr THOMAS CREHAN

10 July 1903 – 26 January 1983



Tom Crehan was born in Market Rasen, Lincolnshire in the UK and went to the Jesuit school of Mount St Mary's. After the usual steps of formation, which for him included a degree in English at London University, he sailed for Southern Rhodesia in 1937. He was posted to St George's College where he spent the next forty-six years, never returning to the UK even for leave.

His father was a railway station master and something of the punctuality of trains made its mark on Tom. Michael O'Halloran said at his funeral, 'he did things at set times, a punctuality that perhaps degenerated into routine. But his railway station was not the tidiest and like train stations in the early days of the century, a place of fire, steam and smoke.' He was oblivious to smoke. Roland von Nidda enlarges on this: 'He smoked like a chimney. Before coming into class he would always take the finishing puffs of the last in a long string of cigarettes. This added to his overall shabby and dishevelled appearance. His room was totally chaotic - papers from top to bottom, ashtrays overflowing with cigarette stubs, and smoke wafting around the room.

'He was a shy, isolated person,' Roland remembers. 'He didn't mix well with others. While we respected him as a teacher, no-one warmed up to him as a person. Apart from his teaching and library work, you would never see him joining others to watch a rugby or cricket match. As a teacher he was extremely dedicated and demanding. He would easily dish out punishment if the homework he set every day was not well done. We were terrified of him. The first thing we did, when getting back our exercise books, was to shake it to see if a 'pink ticket' fell out. The ticket contained the date, your name, the offence, and number of strokes of the cane prescribed. He would always begin a class firing questions on Latin grammar. God help you if you didn't know the answer. This had the effect of ensuring we studied Latin hard, but had a detrimental effect on the other subjects.

'Underneath it all', Roland concludes, 'lurked a kind and extremely conscientious heart of someone who wanted the best for his students. He was a very private man and found it difficult to show feelings and affection to others, except to those he knew very well.'

'His approach was direct, even aggressive' (O'Halloran). He was not given to change and was outraged when things familiar and sacred were tampered with. He seldom said a public Mass and liked to say the old Mass in Latin. 'Whether we are dealing here with an inability to accept change or a refusal to do so,' said O'Halloran, 'the effect was sad. It isolated him from others at moments which were most important to him and to them.' If there was rigidity in his make-up there was also a softness which responded to affection. When the head boy made a presentation to him of a capacious ashtray set in finely polished *mukwa* and it was stolen when the library was broken into, he was very upset.

He found relaxation in holidays, first in Musami and later in Marymount. He would spend his days in an isolated spot watching the birds through his binoculars. In his last illness in St Anne's there was talk of a college boy going home from the hospital. 'Am I going home too?' 'No', said Sr Margaret, 'you are going to heaven!' 'Well, I hope so,' he replied.