

12 February

Fr ANTHONY BEX

1 January 1922 – 12 February 2017



Tony Bex was born in Sheffield but his family moved to London when his father started teaching at St Ignatius, Stamford Hill. His mother was French and this explains Tony's mastery of the language. But he was not happy at St Ignatius, possibly because his father was on staff, and he moved to the de la Salle College in Beulah Hill. George Croft was at school with him by a 'binding coincidence' and remembers his 'effortless clowning' in a concert as a senior in which he was one of three Cockney vendors competing for a hearing at Hyde Park Speakers' Corner.

The novitiate beckoned in 1941 and Tony set out for St Beuno's, noticing the war time question on the bill board at Euston station, 'Is you journey really necessary?' When he arrived he found four others of his class, including George Groft, all of whom had joined unbeknown to each other, but 'the use of Latin in conversation put a reasonable damper on much reminiscing about interpersonal niceties' (George). For regency Tony was sent back to the junior school at Stamford Hill where ten-year-old Brian Enright was a pupil. Brian remembers him as 'a kind and gentle man not treally cut out for the rough and tumble of the classroom.'

After the usual studies, he came to Rhodesia in 1963 where he worked on the Chishawasha out-schools. Brian Enright reminds us that the work was not only in the schools but also included the pastoral care of the people. The school visits were paid for by the government and the pastoral work could thus ride on the back of them. Tony was much more attracted to the pastoral work. In 1969, he moved to St Peter's where he worked, among others, with Wim Smulders.

When his father died his mother wanted him to be near her and Fidelis Mukonori, who knew him at the time, remembers he asked him and some other young students what they thought he should do. They advised he go to be with his mother and Tony spent the years 1973-81 in the UK in various parishes within reach of his mother.

On his return to what had become Zimbabwe, Tony moved to the Chinhoyi area as one of the first of the 'British' to cross the Dike and work in what was the German Jesuit area. Fr Arrupe had initiated the merger to form a new province but it was not an easy adjustment at first. Tony was just the man to build bridges. He took an interest in everyone and diocesan Fr Johane Nguluwe remembers how he arranged for him to visit his relatives in Britain when he, Johnane, was studying there and was lonely at times. Tony also supported the Nazareth Centre for the poor in Chinhoyi and found funds for them as he also did for the Ruvarashe home for people with disabilities.

He had a wide circle of friends and kept up with them as, for example, Dr Lamplugh's daughters and Wim Smulders' family knew well. Late in life he tracked down a niece who lived in Canada and she was thrilled to get to know 'Uncle Anthony'. She was later to say, 'he was the most loving and caring person I have ever known.'

Tony was spiritual father at the seminary in 1999 and eight years later he took over the province archives. There he could indulge his love of history, inherited from his father, and his love of the Society. Occasionally, he might say someone was a 'ruddy nuisance' (sic) but his default attitude was to see the best in people. When someone left the seminary or the priesthood, he would say, 'I always thought he was s finie chap.'