

7 March

Fr JOHN MARBAIX

27 April 1931 – 7 March 2003



This writer was in the novitiate with John. He was a calming elder among us, a boisterous gaggle hardly out of school, and an obvious choice for the exalted position of beadle. Born in Romford, he started out as an aeronautics engineer serving in de Haviland but at the age of 27 he dropped all that and drove to the novitiate in Roehampton in his Alfa Romeo. He had already been helping in Wimbledon parish and it was no surprise that he ‘crossed the common’ to the novitiate. He did a year’s regency at St George’s in the then Salisbury and the only incident recorded is that he drove the four-ton lorry at speed past a police station. Arrested, he asked for a copy of the charge as ‘no one in the community will believe this lorry can go at 50 mph unless I have it in writing.’

Back in the UK, he put his skills to work as minister at Farm St and then at Osterley, a house for late vocations. In 1981 he became Mission Procurator with Tony Montfort and in 1983 went to the parish in Barbados. Later he was superior in Edinburgh and St Beuno’s. He was a ‘practical, warm, caring man with a sense of fun who got on with everyone’. ‘He excelled in quiet, unobtrusive empathy.’ The required letter of commendation for the Barbados authorities ran: ‘John Marbaix is a man of the highest character. He is a gentle person who has shown in a number of posts that he can get on well with people of all nationalities. ... There is no danger that he will disturb the peace and good order of Barbados’.

John took a group of Osterley students to Calcutta and when asked what impression it had on him, he replied, ‘sometimes you hear of a person you have never met ... or you see photos of them ... and then they come through the door and you think, Ah! Now I know what they’re really like. Well, after being in Calcutta, that’s how I feel about the gospel. Now I think I see what the gospel really means.’