

26 March

Br JOHN MULLIGAN

28 May 1905 – 26 March 1993



Born in Rosewell, Midlothian, Scotland, John worked as a carpet weaver before entering the Society in 1925. In 1930 he was at St Aidan's as housekeeper and in 1932 at Monte Cassino as miller and builder. From 1934 to his return to England in 1937, he was at Chishawasha as carpenter and music teacher.

On his return to the UK he became a sacristan and virtually this became his life's work in place after place. He was 27 years at St Francis Xavier's, Liverpool, the centre of a network of altar servers, church cleaners, parishioners and the like. Constantly present, there was a day when a group of eight- to ten-year-olds entered the church in search of adventure. When accosted by Br Mulligan they say they had come to pray at 'God's coffin'. This turned out to be the large construction that housed the bellows for the organ. John simply said, 'let's pray together' and he led them through the rosary. We are not told if this was the adventure they were looking for but some came back the next day for more.

The 1950s was the time of packed churches and SFX had 13,000 on its register. There were five Catholic schools in the parish besides the College of St Francis Xavier. There could be 1,500 at every Mass on a Sunday and the priests said 21 individual Masses every day in those times before concelebration. Every Sunday there was a High Mass with all that involved for a sacristan and there were many devotions, novenas and the like. To be a sacristan was a full-time job then and Br Ken Vance remembers John as he, Ken, was a small boy at the time. It was a 'slum' parish then – a place for the poor - but in the 1960s the government provided better housing and SFX College itself moved to greener pastures.