

14 April

## Fr GREGORY CROFT

5 November 1920 – 14 April 2003



Greg Croft was ‘every inch a Londoner’ and was educated at St Ignatius, Stamford Hill. It was another era with the novitiate community of 81 at St Beuno’s, (ten priests, 12 brothers and 59 novices - 8 of them brothers). It was war time and Greg did six years of regency at

Sunderland, where he was active in the scouts, and a further period at Mount St Mary’s, Spinkhill. In 1955, after theology and ordination at Heythrop, he went to St George’s, Salisbury and in 1962 he moved to St Aidan’s.

Of that time, David Dryden remembers, ‘Greg always loved music and would have a record on while he worked in the physics lab at night. He ran the choir at St Aidan’s and also loved singing in a group. He once stripped an organ down and rebuilt it.

His enthusiasm got many boys building science projects for the annual science show/competition. Some of them won prizes and even bursaries as a result. I remember when five of his A level class were accepted to do medicine at the university.’

But he was soon needed at St Ignatius Chishawasha as the school reached A level. He was one of those who gave a warm welcome to the present writer just off a plane from the UK in 1966. He spent 46 years in the classroom, the labs and the grounds of the different schools where he served.

He himself was self-taught in all these areas. He arrived at St Ignatius just as the United Nations imposed far-reaching economic sanctions on the country (1965) and his remit was to set up the physics programme as the Rhodesian government had (reluctantly) agreed to allow A level at the school. He was a genius at making sophisticated equipment out of ‘rubbish’ material which he picked up wherever he could find it. John Gambanga, writing in *The Herald* at the time of Greg’s retirement from St Ignatius in 1991, quoted Greg as saying, ‘no good teacher actually teaches, he simply starts the learning process.’ Greg’s gift was his enthusiasm for his subject which he shared with his students and they simply

picked it up and did the work. He was not successful at first as his enthusiasm spilled over the restricted channels set by the syllabus. He was disconsolate with the first A level physics results but he steadied himself, with the support of the community, and learnt to focus and his results steadily improved. He became so successful that he was invited on to the Joint Matriculation Board setting up a new physics course at Witwatersrand and Rhodes universities in South Africa. In 1978, new laboratories for chemistry, physics and biology, paid for by the German Catholic development agency, Misereor, were completed.

Greg also developed a large vegetable and fruit garden behind the laboratories and studded the campus with flowering shrubs and flowers. A new comer to St Ignatius in August 1966, walking to the Senior House, was accompanied by multi coloured petunias on both sides of the path. The path remains but the petunias are long gone. As if these activities were not enough Greg also took over the grading of the gravel road to the bridge at the foot of the hill. The rains lacerated this stretch of the road but Greg was quickly out on the tractor to manicure it back into shape.

On finally retiring from St Ignatius, Greg moved to Kutama and then St Albert's and St Boniface in semi-retirement. He attended the funeral of Archbishop Chakaipa in 2003 and when he returned to Richartz House he died peacefully in his chair. The picture shows Greg (right) and his younger brother George who followed him into the Society and is happily still with us at 96. (The photo shows the two brothers. Greg on the right).