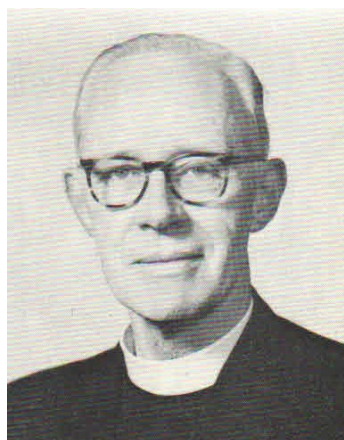


24 April

Fr PHELM ROONEY 26 November 1904 – 24 April 1975



The obituary for Phelim Rooney in *Letters and Notices* goes on – and on! 25 pages, the last two in French. You wonder why? Part of the reason is the writer, Vincent Turner, elder of Campion Hall, Oxford, for decades and one attuned to Phelim's ways and interests. Born in Dublin, Phelim went to school at Stonyhurst where he was an all-rounder winning prizes all along the way in the classroom and on the sports field. He did French and Spanish at Trinity College, Dublin and then, to the initial dismay of his family, entered the Society in 1927. Lord Chief Justice Devlin, a school friend, said of him 'his handsome, distinguished and urbane presence never failed to charm.'

Imaginative without being adventurous or critical, his was a cautious mind, studying a situation carefully before deciding. At Stonyhurst he was in charge of the exam timetable. 'Staff fumed but he was unruffled and willing to discuss.' He was also a great encourager of the arts and was both actor and producer in plays. 'He took the view that the performing arts released genuine potentialities that otherwise were under-developed, and that Jesuit education was over cerebral and conducive to philistinism.'

He cared about 'good taste and a measure of style and elegance in his environment ... ugly things were hurtful and muddied the quality of imagination.' Certainly this writer was aware of this environment while at Campion Hall in Phelim Rooney's time. He had been appointed rector of St George's in 1952 but his tenure lasted only for a matter of months as he fell ill and had to return to the UK. When he recovered, he returned to Campion Hall where he remained for the rest of his life and served under five Masters of the Hall. While his great interest was the welfare of the scholastics, he was aware he was not an academic in a highly charged academic setting. Turner thought he was 'absurdly in awe of Campion Hall's distinguished guests while he himself was a principal ornament of the Senior Common Room.'

He disliked any change in the ordered existence of the Hall and one foreign scholastic, aware of this, arriving late at night, preferred a sleeping bag by the canal rather than venture to gain entrance to the Hall. Vincent Turner quoted a US President as summing up Phelim's approach; 'no result of value can ever be reached ... except through slow and gradual development, the careful adaptations and nice modifications of growth.'

In 1975, after just turning 70 he became ill and 'glided gently out of life. In great peace, much sleep, sometimes barely conscious ...'