

25 April

Fr EDWARD ENNIS

30 October 1919 – 25 April 1992



Visiting Fr Ennis at his office in Prestage House when he was Superior of the Salisbury Mission, you would find nothing on his desk except the actual letter or document he was working on. Jock Earle, later provincial (in 1981), after Ennis had moved back to London in 1977 as Treasurer, spoke of ‘the immaculate desk with each file immediately available, voluminous, clear

and detailed, his swift assimilation of accounts and computerisation’ (late 1970s).

Kevin Fox recalls Jock as saying that his initial view had been that Edward was bureaucratically narrow-minded and unimaginative; but he came to have a warm appreciation of Edward's humanity as well as his incomparable efficiency.

Born in Putney, on the south bank of the river Thames in London, Ennis went to the Jesuit school at Wimbledon. He worked in shipping and insurance for three years before joining the Society in 1939. He taught at Preston and Stonyhurst and was ordained in 1952. Three years later he was at St George's in Salisbury where his competency was quickly noted and, in 1961, he became rector. He improved the playing fields and paid off the debts. Ken Nixon credited him with bringing ‘order to the college; the boys were better fed, had hot showers and a kindlier form of discipline’. When the mission superior, Terrence Corrigan, became provincial in 1964, Ennis took his place.

While he had a passion for order and efficiency, his sincerity and kindness were always apparent. There was a ‘friendliness and good humour and a gift for playful teasing.’ But he was a shy man who could come across as pompous. Neilus O Donovan, who knew him from school days, thought his many years in authority seemed to ‘cramp his spontaneity’. The story that did the rounds, true or not, was of his booming voice on the telephone, audible throughout Prestage House, ‘This is, of course, confidential’, does not quite fit (or does it?) with his reputation for order and efficiency.

Brian Enright noted that he supported the projects he inherited from Corrigan – St Ignatius, the School of Social Work and Silveira House – though John Dove felt his support for Silveira was cooler than Corrigan's and he (Dove) put it down to his coming from St George's. In 1969, when there were plans to move the novitiate back to Silveira House, John Dove had to push back hard to survive

though Ennis later came round to valuing Silveira. John Dove much appreciated his humility in changing his mind.

When his term as Superior was over, he became Vicar General of the Archdiocese and turned his attention to the issues there. Brian noted that while as superior, he had vigorously defended the Jesuit point of view, now, as VG, he 'changed sides' and did the same for the Archdiocese. He campaigned for the building of rural churches and acquired 74 sites and gradually, with the help of Jesuit Missions in London, built churches on around a third of them even though it was war time.

Learning of the deplorable living conditions of the people with leprosy at Mutemwa, near Mutoko NE of Harare, from Pauline Bishop, whose husband, Chris, was a member of the Justice and Peace Commission, Ennis set up the Friends of Mutemwa Association and asked John Bradburne, an English Vagabond of God, as the two books about him are titled, to be warden there.

Ennis also supported Luisa Guidotti, the Italian doctor at Mutemwa who was arrested (and later killed) for treating a guerrilla, and he visited her in Chikurubi prison and, with others, arranged bail for her.

In 1976 Ennis became administrator of the Cathedral and set about refurbishing Campion House. The following year he was called to London as Treasurer of the province and set about learning about financial management on a big scale. Trevor Gardner, a member of the Province Finance Committee noticed 'his clear understanding of the underlying principles of financial management and his remarkable grasp of detail.' Ennis was also a founding trustee of the Cambridge Livingstone Trust, which provided post-graduate scholarships to students from Southern Africa.

Kevin Fox closes this memory of Fr Ennis, recalling Edward's own advice: 'Never let superiors tell you it's never been done before, Kevin. It always has!'