

May 27

Fr MICHAEL ROSS

27 May 1916 – 27 May 2001



Michael was born in Eltham in Kent and was educated in Beaumont where he returned to teach after entering the novitiate in 1934 and doing the usual studies. Ordained in 1948 he went on to do a further fifteen years of teaching physics at Beaumont. In 1968 he came to St George's where his name was to be associated with physics, mathematics, astronomy, computers, 'fixing things' and the grounds for the next 30 years.

Peter Dean, a fellow teacher, remembers how 'he searched magazines on electrons for useful circuits which he would then build and use.' Another, Robin Stokes, said he 'devised an experiment to measure the specific charge of an electron – a highly sophisticated piece of equipment which had cost an enormous sum to purchase in my previous school.' 'Light Bulb' Ross encouraged students to find their own solutions and share their work with the class. He was also a good picker of locks, Mark Hackett tells us 'though he would never allow anyone to watch him ply his trade'.

Michael also restored the observatory, started by Fr Goetz in 1903. The Astronomy Club went on to observe lunar eclipses and the transit of stars.

When Gregory Croft was starting the Physics programme at St Ignatius in the days of sanctions, Michael 'gave unstintingly of his fund of practical and mathematical knowledge especially in things electronic. He found designs and plans and diagrams and even precious specialised components and gave them to me ... In later years at St Ignatius, we could boast that the first oscilloscopes we possessed we had constructed ourselves. Our first laser and our first computer were homemade; so were clocks, radios, spectrometers, micro-wave radar, Fizean apparatus to measure the speed of light, Milikan's apparatus for measuring the charge of a single electron, a rudimentary silicon diode (made from Zimbabwean sand) and even a solar cooker to make mid-morning coffee. Most of these things which my students work on with me would hardly have been possible without Michael's continuing help and encouragement. In this country today there are many engineers, doctors and university teachers who owe a great debt to Michael though many may never have met him personally.'

With regard to the grounds, the art teacher, Dawn Bannister, wrote, 'when I first arrived, he ignored me totally - I am, after all, a woman – until I wandered into his garden armed with secateurs. He suddenly appeared.' She wanted a few flowers for a still life painting class but he thought she was disturbing the universe.

When he was diagnosed with Parkinson's he was devastated but he faced his sufferings with courage.