

June 3

## Fr FRANCIS ROBERTS

7 April 1910 – 3 June 1978

This writer never thought the day would come when he was to write about his novice master! Born in Brindle, near Preston NW England, his first decade of life was dominated by the Great War when his father was killed and his mother died when he was nine. An aunt cared for him and he went to Preston Catholic College though he lived in the Benedictine territory of Bamber Bridge. When a vocation came up, he thought of the monks but in the end opted for the Jesuit novitiate in 1929.



He was described by the boys of St George's and Stonyhurst, where he was the prefect of discipline in both places as 'strict and fair' and *mutatis mutandis* that seems to have been his approach to all the tasks he was given. Lively, urbane and unruffled, he was a good community man in the sense that he engaged much in conversation and had an inexhaustible fund of stories about Jesuits some of which found their way into his novitiate exhortations. He was 'a sympathetic listener but would slip in a wry or mock-sympathetic remark which punctured the aggrieved outburst.' He enjoyed describing the outlandish things people did but these tales normally ended with, 'He left the Society.' On first acquaintance one might think he was 'prim and proper' but those who came to know him recognised a hidden warmth. Yet 'there was usually a distance in his personal relationships, as though he was rather afraid of implicating himself in the lives of others' (Robert Carty). In his vacations from St George's he would go to Silveira Mission but the impression arises that it was not to learn the language and get to know the people but to enjoy the company and conversation of 'Frick', Fr Ferguson.

In 1954, he became rector and PP of St Wildred's Preston where he was 'an excellent visitor, concentrating on the less salubrious district off Lune St. Short frequent visits were his strong points. With a brisk step, he would visit six families within an hour' (Alan Robinson).

When he came off being novice master, he went to Lauriston St, Edinburgh, 'where the people idolised him' (A Mercy nun in the parish). They were really saddened when he left for Wrexham. Maybe in later life he allowed his warm nature an airing. Certainly the bishops and priests of the places where he served though most highly of him. But he was at a loss to understand the questioning attitudes of novices and scholastics in the mid-sixties and was uncomfortable with the changes in the Church at that time though he was loyal and co-operative in practice. After two strokes he did at Nazareth House, Wrexham.