

8 July

Fr KEVIN McELHATTON 2 October 1933 - 8 July 2011



Kevin was a Geordie, that is one born in NE of England who speak their own dialect of English. He was educated in the local Jesuit school in Sunderland and entered the Jesuits in 1951. He did his regency teaching at St Michael's Leeds and was ordained in 1963. A kidney infection had prevented him going to Campion Hall with his companions at the normal time but he did a degree in history after ordination.

He served as socius to the Master of Novices and later succeeded him holding the post for seven years and producing four provincials. In 1982 he went as parish priest to Brixton, a parish in London with many immigrants. He made an impression there by his knowledge of the people and how he could remember their names, especially the children. Ten years later he went to South Africa where he served as parish priest at Orlando West. It was there, Gerry J Hughes tells us, that 'he really found the sort of pastoral work among the poor which brought out the very best in him'. He enlarged the church.

Physically, he was once described as 'a kindly reindeer', I suppose because of his height and angular features. Kindness and gentleness are certainly the qualities he is remembered by.

Paddy Connors brings out the link between music and novice masters! After quoting several others, he writes of Kevin's accompanying Br Johnny Monks who liked to sing at concerts but was rather deaf. Kevin would start off gently on the piano and then as Johnny wandered off key, he would 'crash a chord'. But Johnny would take no notice and continued on another note. The result, it seems, was hilarious.

Incidentally, Paddy goes on to quote his nephew, Paul McCreesh, on the music he wrote for the Christian pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela:

The sense of life's transience is fundamental to most artistic and musical expression, and indeed to existence itself. For some, religion is an absurd suspension of reality; for others, it is an affirmation of the deepest certainty. In the end, here, it matters not whether one believes; this music speaks to us across the centuries, calibrating the joy of life, the beauty of the world, the love of dear ones, the fragility of our existence, and our deep-rooted desire to understand the ultimately unknowable.