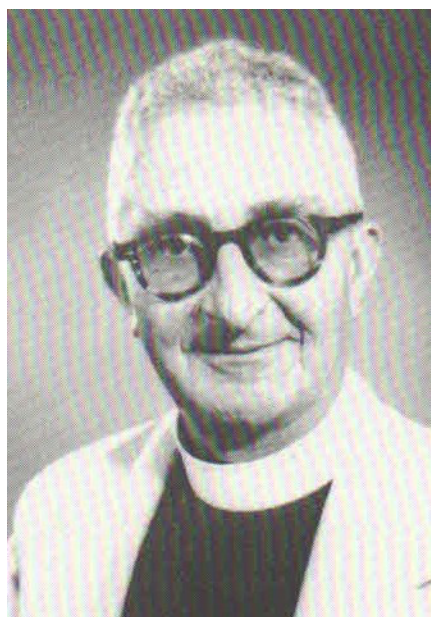


27 July

Fr JOHN CARAMAN

5 September 1905 – 27 July 1983



Born in Rickmansworth, some thirty miles north of London, six years before his better-known Jesuit brother Philip, who wrote a number of books including accounts of the pre-suppression Jesuits in Ethiopia and Paraguay, John was educated at Stonyhurst and went to Wadham College, Oxford, where his contemporary, Dr Gerard Malone-Lee, wrote of their ‘leisurely, carefree existence enjoying marvellous food in ‘hall’ and being waited on by a ‘scout.’ All were well-dressed and enjoyed parties, bridge, theatre, film and punting on the Cherwell¹. ... He managed in a gentlemanly way to keep his examiners in their place.’ There were few

Catholics in Oxford then and much prejudice. ‘He is nice fellow, but a Roman Catholic.’ He never lived in the same house as his brother, except briefly at Heythrop, but they kept up a correspondence. Philip, the writer, said, ‘I enjoyed his letters. He wrote with a clarity and conciseness I envied.’

In these circumstances, it was quite a surprise to Malone-Lee when Caraman announced he was joining the Jesuit. He entered in 1927 and was ordained in 1936 and two years later he was at St George’s. Teaching did not suit him and he moved into administration: minister and then procurator. He paid attention to the Malawians on the support staff and spent two holidays in Malawi (then Nyasaland), learning their language, Chewa. Gradually he moved into full time ministry with them, persuading his superiors of their needs.

And, truly, they were neglected. They did not live in reach of the rural missions or in town. They were in the mines or the commercial farms. Caraman acquired a second-hand station wagon which served as his moving house and he began to move through the commercial farms and mines reaching out to the workers. He covered a broad arc around Salisbury which include Chinhoyi and Mvurwi. He was helped by a faithful companion who looked after him. His ‘collection’ was ‘in kind’ as he gathered old window frames, unused bricks, bags of cement and the like with which he built schools and mass centres. The workers could not

¹ Manoeuvring a boat, built like an oversized open coffin, through the water, using leverage gained by standing and sticking a long pole in the floor of the river and pushing, hand over hand. A relaxing occupation.

attend Mass until after work. This, together with Church rules at the time meant that Mass began after midnight. So the time before was used for confessions and meeting people individually. Frank Barr wrote that when Caraman was in Malawi he studied the methods of the Missionaries of Africa and the Montfort fathers there so as to use the same methods and not confuse the Malawians in Zimbabwe. The Dominican sisters gave him a base in Emerald Hill to which he would return every month or six weeks for a rest and to catch up with correspondence. He used to write to the family in Malawi of every Catholic he met on his rounds and keep them in touch.

After 15 years, in 1958, he settled in Chinhoyi, founding the parish there and the next year he did the same in Mvurwi. By 1973 it was time for him to retire from this strenuous moving around as the German Jesuits had by then set up missions serving the places he used to visit. He became minister at St Ignatius College but, at first, subjected the community to the sort of frugal fare he was used to himself in his wanderings. Eventually a solution was found and he remained happily there until the day he was found unconscious on his bed in 1983.