

11 August

Fr HUGH ROSS

16 January 1920 – 11 August 2016



Born in Eltham, Kent, England, four years after his brother Michael, who was also a Jesuit and also at St George's, Hugh had the unusual distinction of never being anywhere else except the College (52 years). He joined the Society in 1937, did a degree in Maths at Oxford and was ordained in 1954. He was a gifted Maths teacher in that he was enthusiastic about his subject and infused his students with the same enthusiasm. He had the great ability to see their potential and allow them to reach for it. Mark Oxley, one of his students in the 1960s, was pleased with himself when he got 93% in an exam; but Hugh's report shocked him; 'He could have done better.' He was always on the look-out for a conference on Maths and continually kept himself abreast of advances in the subject.

Hugh was also a great coach in swimming and rugby. He protested when the rector told him, on his arrival, he was the new swimming coach, 'I know nothing about swimming. I can't even swim myself.' But he was told to get on with it. He learnt the craft not from doing but from reading and became one of the best-known coaches in the city. His swimmers raised the standard of schools swimming in the country and in his later years the Inter-Schools trophy was named after Hugh.

So, he demanded the best from his trainees in sport as he did in the classroom. He also was strict and fair in the matters of order and discipline. Some boys complained about food and the authorities proposed caning them but Hugh investigated and came to the conclusion the boys were right. He took their side. 'They were not punished', wrote Paul Edwards, 'and Hugh's shares rose rapidly.'

Hugh loved the wilds and was happy to go with the students to the Chimanimani mountains whenever he could. The province cottage in Nyanga was also a popular venue for him, his brother and the Croft brothers, but it was second best to the 'Chimanis'. He would bring books with him wherever he went and search for the scientific (Latin) name for every tree or shrub he was unfamiliar with. He would wander off on his own and seemed content with his own company. He had an independent mind and while some unreflective students at the college, sons of commercial farmers, welcomed UDI in 1965, Hugh told them it was illegal and would create problems in the future.

He was much appreciated as a teacher and a Jesuit and almost 200 e mails greeted him on his Golden Jubilee at St George's. He retired to England when he felt he could no longer teach as he felt there was little further he could do in the country.