

10 October

Fr GEORGE EARLE 20 September 1925 – 10 October 1003



Jock, as he was known, spent only eleven of his seventy-eight years in Africa but it is worth giving some space to a man who made an impact wherever he was. He was not born in a Jesuit parish nor did he go to a Jesuit school. He wasn't even a Catholic. He was born in Winchester, the former capital city of England, and went to the prestigious school there founded in 1382. He was called up to serve in the Royal Air Force where typhoid put him in hospital for four months. The only book available was the *New Testament* and his only visitors military chaplains. At the same time, he later wrote, 'I was greatly impressed by the Jesuit Missions in India

and would like to share in this great work.' This was his cannon ball and he entered the Catholic Church in 1945. He then did a history degree at Balliol College, Oxford, and entered the Society in 1950. After his regency at Beaumont he did his theology at Lyons and was ordained in 1960.

He joined the staff at Stonyhurst in 1962 and within a few years became headmaster. Then began the imaginative series of initiatives. He gave 'artistic and cultural breadth to the curriculum', encouraged the founding of the 'Stonyhurst family' – lay staff, students and Jesuits, gave lay people tasks that hitherto were always done by Jesuits, started a governing body for the school, started a bursary fund, initiated new steps in the pastoral and academic care of the students. Kevin Fox, in his homily at Jock's funeral, said, 'All these seem old hat today (2003) but in the 1960s they were new even revolutionary and Jock pioneered them all.'

Besides, there was constant building work as the school had to expand to meet the influx from Beaumont which had been closed. Jock knew the names of all the 500 students and quite a few details about them. He was not always tactful and when someone demurred from introducing changes he wanted in the pilgrimage to Lourdes, he told them, 'You're not taking a bunch of old ladies to Bognor.' Someone who knew Jock well said the key to understanding him was his curiosity. He wanted to see what was possible. He insisted every student take up a musical instrument and many discovered a talent they never knew they had.

The 1970s saw him taking initiatives in the *Way* Community writing *The Way* Journal and giving the Exercises. He was also assistant for Education where he worked with Peter Hackett. In 1981 Jock became provincial and Peter spoke tellingly of how he changed the character of provincial government. 'The man himself was one element. Slightly larger than life. Sporting the sobriquet Jock like an officer sure of his popularity, secure in his Balliol background, and with his convert heart worn on his sleeve, he shared self-knowledge as part of the authority of leadership. It was the strangest mixture of self-consciousness ingenuousness and mild arrogance'. Here his care of individuals and his ease in making important decisions, showed itself. He wrote to the province twice a year with a personal word attached to each letter. He phoned everyone who was living alone each Christmas Day.

In 1987 he came to South Africa where, as provincial, he had achieved a target of sending thirty men. There he worked with the National Seminary and in developing the ministry of the Exercises. He made Murray house an even more welcoming house than it already was. But he was forced to return to London to face a charge that he had abused a boy while at Stonyhurst. The trial got nowhere but Jock felt judged and side-lined and it hurt. He was unable to say a public Mass. It was a terrible time and on top of it he had severe arthritis and other health problems. But he continued working, this time with asylum seekers and JRS. He would go miles by public transport and wait patiently for a long time just to see one person. They would call him 'Grandfather' or 'Daddy Jock'. Michael Bossy wrote, 'He was truly a Jesuit who made offerings of greater moment'.

There was a large congregation at his funeral and the Cardinal was represented by Bishop Longley and wrote a warm letter. (*Photo by Carlos Reyes*)