

13 October

Fr HERBERT PRESTON

10 June 1897 – 13 October 1969



Bert was the sixth of nine children born in London and he used to accompany Fr Bernard Vaughan when he was preaching to people ‘from windows and table tops.’ He was educated at St Ignatius, Stamford Hill, and entered the Society in 1914 as the war was starting. He did some tending of the wounded even as a novice. He taught science at Beaumont as a regent and after ordination in 1929, came to Africa where he spent almost forty years between St Aidan’s and St George’s. He tried to learn the language at Musami but told the Superior

he just could not manage and he was soon posted to the job of minister in both colleges.

Being a minister means being a ‘dogsbody’ – one who does all the boring routine jobs. Bert did it for 38 years. He was always available, always calm. Each morning he would celebrate an early Mass and head off to the market to bid for vegetables, fruit and the rest. He was known to the market people one of whom held up a bunch of vegetables, ‘Just the thing for an unmarried father of a large family. Fr Preston?’ He was always in his office with the door open and always had time for a chat.

St George’s was always welcoming to visitors from the missions, announced or unannounced, and Bert would even let them buy on the college account or even give them a blank cheque. Presumably they would settle up later! His was an unfailing courtesy and someone used the phrase of Edmund Burke, ‘he was a real Englishman who managed life without fuss or ill-humour’. He used to give retreats, especially to sisters and in his last days when the sisters at St Anne’s gave him the best room where he could be quiet. But he found it lonely during the long nights and asked for a noisier room. He got one next to the nurses’ station.