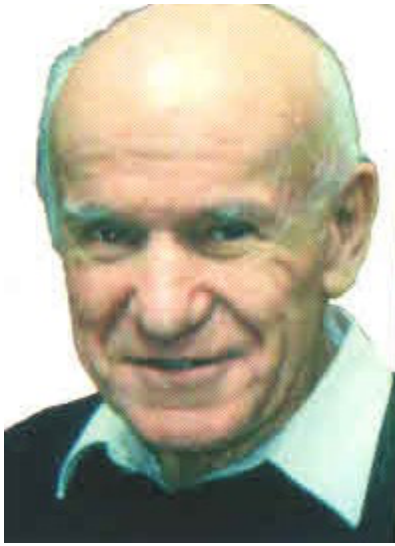


17 October

Br FRANC PREGELJ

18 February 1922 - 17 October 2007



Franc Pregelj was a forester in the mountains of his native Slovenia. He also worked on a farm, was a baker's assistant, decorator, and electrician's mate before he was forced to serve in the army of the occupying power, Italy. When Italy dropped out of the war the Germans forced him to serve them and as they were gradually losing ground, he switched to the Slovenian freedom fighters who were opposed to Tito. They once ambushed a German army unit, seizing their uniforms and lorry and then entered a German garrison and obtained a quantity of arms. Another time he was sent to assassinate Tito and arrived in the night just after Tito, who had been tipped off, had fled. Tito fought the Germans but wanted a communist Yugoslavia and Franc and those who thought like him hoped the allies, Britain and America, would stop Tito. They didn't. Franc was appalled by the sight of new-born babies abandoned by their communist mothers by the roadside as the mothers could do nothing. Franc too could do nothing but sat with them until they died. Franc fled to Italy but was treated as a POW and it was not until 1947 that he was free to go to England. Franc was a wanted man in Yugoslavia and Tito was out to get him. He was under surveillance by the British Special Branch for years. He was stateless as he could not go back to Slovenia and it took him 44 years to achieve British citizenship. He had a choice in Britain: work in the coal mines or on a farm. He chose the mines and worked there for twelve years before joining in the Society in 1959.

It was a time the novitiate at Silveira was starting and he was one of those who went out to swell the numbers a little. He stayed on after vows and worked at Monte Cassino in the garden before moving to the farm at Chishawasha in 1966. He was skilled in an astonishing range of activities beyond the ones mentioned at the beginning of this short life: dam building, stock breeding, farm management, farm buildings, organising Credit Unions for workers.

In 1975 he returned to the UK and the following year went to Wau in the Sudan. After three years he was back in the UK at Craighead Retreat House, near Glasgow, where he developed a garden that was much appreciated by retreatants. Paul Nicolson, who put so much into preparing his retreats, recalled wistfully that retreatants, when asked for their assessment of the retreat, would say, 'It was great but the highlight for me was a word with the gardener'!