

19 October

Fr JOHN GRUMMITT

2 March 1930 – 19 October 2009



John or ‘Percy’ or ‘Grum’ or ‘George’ was born in Malayasia and educated at Riverview, Australia, and Stonyhurst. He entered the Society in 1947 and was known from day one for his extrovert, irrepressible character, ‘something of a playboy’ according to ‘Bertie’ Banyard, who preached at his funeral. But then, when Grum was posted to St Mary’s Hall (SMH), the middle school at Stonyhurst, for regency, ‘Johnnie’ Maher saw at once the potential in him and ‘gave him his head. All the qualities of dealing with people, organising events and harnessing technology were activated.’ During his theology at the old Heythrop, this writer was roped into scouting and Grum was in charge. He produced, in the days long before desk top publishing, a multi-coloured programme of events during a long week-end when the college was invaded by scout troops from far and wide.

After ordination in 1961 he was sent to St George’s to run the recently established Hartmann House, a middle school for the college. Here he further developed the skills he had practiced at SMH. When the Society withdrew from the running of the school, he did a degree at the University where he gained an Upper Second in English and the Poetry Prize. He then returned to the college, this time to the upper school. But he was unhappy and wrote to the Superior of the Mission about the ‘moribund community, complete lack of communication and a series of tightly enclaved empires.’ He made it clear he would ‘crack up’ if asked to stay in these circumstances and was duly allowed to leave for the UK.

He went to St Aloysius, Glasgow, where he was ‘a breath of fresh air’ (Bertie) and transformed the Drama Society with funding from the ‘Grummitt Education Trust’ set up by Ma Grumm (his mother). Bertie says ‘his dealings with a very conservative headmaster were a model of diplomacy laced with cunning’. In 1976, Grum became headmaster of Mount St Mary’s for fifteen years. Tony Nye wrote, ‘he had a great love for the school and took a real interest in developing talents. He was a truly unique character and he will be sadly missed.’ A later head remembered ‘with affection and amusement ... his interview style ... prospective candidates listened to his musings rather than

being asked to say anything about their suitability ... Presumably good listeners were appointed.'

Heavy snows once brought down power lines and Grum deemed the essential services to be covered by the two generators in the school to be his secretary's typewriter and the tropical fish tank. Everyone else had torches.

Kevin Fox wrote a tribute to John Grummitt which contained his unchanging message to the school, 'Whatever talent you have use it freely for the greater glory of God.' In this, he led by example.

Grum went on to develop a programme for 'gap-year' students from Jesuit schools to give them experience of other parts of the world – all funded by Ma Grumm's Association. He was also chaplain at Donhead, the prep school for Wimbledon, and he ended his life in the newly opened purpose-built home for the aged and infirm in Boscombe.