

29 October

Fr WILLIAM THOMAS 16 October 1908 – 29 October 1990



Born in Cardiff, Bill Thomas went to Stonyhurst to school and did his regency there. He entered the Society in 1927 and was ordained in 1940. Two years later he became a military chaplain and accompanied the troops in the invasion of Normandy. He received the Military Cross from Field Marshall Montgomery in person for 'shielding the bodies of wounded men with his own.' After the war he was in Boscombe but when the Korean war broke out, he was again called up though he was invalided out after a year. He went to Stonyhurst from 1951 to 59 when he came to Harare.

He was resident at the Cathedral with special responsibility for those areas of the city where people of mixed race ('coloureds' in the language of the time) lived. He served them for nearly thirty years and 'knew them all' and kept careful records for them all. He defended them at a time when they suffered discrimination. In 1968 he was able to move closer to them when he joined Fr Leslie McKenna at Braeside. Leslie preached warmly of him at his funeral without omitting some of the abrasive moments between the two of them! They had totally different schedules leading to their communicating by notes left under the door! Bill was a poor sleeper and would be up at all hours moving about in the kitchen. Every morning he would say Mass at St Martin's for the sisters even if he had to walk the two miles when his car broke down.

A very private person he would not hear of a celebration for his jubilee of entry into the Society or his ordination. When his sister died, he just went for walk. He had a great love for the Society. George Croft remembers him (he was taught by him as a boy) as 'an attractive slightly mysterious man, a composer of acrostics, an actor in disguise, terse and walking rapidly, sometimes stammering. Mark Hackett remembers him at Bournemouth taking them as boys on cycle rides and on the river Stour.