

Fr GEORGE CROFT

24 June 1925 – 5 November 2023

*George Croft was in his 99th year of life, 82nd year in the Society of Jesus,
68th year of priesthood and 64th year in Final Vows.*

<i>Ort.</i> 24 Jun 1925	<i>Diac.</i> 29-Jul-1956	<i>Dies.</i> 2 Feb 1960
<i>Loc. Nat.</i> London, England (UK)	<i>Ord.</i> 31 Jul 1956 by	<i>Defunc.</i> 5 Nov 2023
<i>Ingr.</i> 7 Sep 1942	Archbishop Francis Grimshaw	<i>Loc. Defunc.</i> Harare, Zimbabwe
<i>Loc. Ingr.</i> St Beuno's, N. Wales (UK)	of Birmingham	<i>Date of Funeral</i> 9 November 2023
<i>Mag.</i> Stonyhurst, Lancs, England (UK)	<i>Loc. Ord.</i> Heythrop (Oxon)	<i>Place of Funeral</i> Chishawasha Parish, Zimbabwe
<i>Stud.</i> Psychology at Oxon & Fordham	<i>Grad.</i> P4	<i>Place of Burial</i> Chishawasha Cemetery, Zimbabwe
<i>Sub-Diac.</i> 28-Jul-1956	<i>Loc. Grad.</i> Fordham	<i>Prov.</i> SAP



George Sebastian Croft, known as ‘Yog’ to his family, was born in Hornsey London, the second of two sons who both became Jesuits. Fr Fidelis Mukonori, at George’s funeral, marvelled at his parents’ generosity in giving both their children to the Society of Jesus. The question, ‘Who will look after us when we are old?’ did not enter their minds.

George was educated at Jesuit St Ignatius College and entered the Society in 1942 at St Beuno’s, North Wales, where the novitiate was located for much of the Second World War. After his Juniorate there he went to Heythrop College near Oxford in 1946 where he studied philosophy before proceeding to Oxford to study PPP (Philosophy, Physiology and Psychology) in 1949.

He had a year’s regency at Stonyhurst before returning to Heythrop to do theology in 1953 and was ordained there in 1956. In 1957, he returned to St Beuno’s to do his tertianship before going to Fordham, New York, to do a PhD in Clinical Psychology. He then returned to Heythrop to teach psychology from 1961-1970 and when the college moved to London in 1970, he went with it.

After seventeen years, it was deemed a change would be good and he came to Africa to teach his subject at the Regional Seminary at Chishawasha in 1978. Again, he had a change of venue when the seminary was divided in 2000 and George went with the philosophers to Bulawayo where he remained until 2014. George was well known for going, often by public transport, to every ordination where ever it took place in the length and breadth of Zimbabwe. His 36 years of devoted service in the formation of future priests was acknowledged by the huge turn out of priests, including Bishop Rudolf Nyandoro of Gweru, at his funeral in Chishawasha. In 2016, at the time of the celebration of his 60 years as a priest, Provincial Chiedza Chimhanda, wrote to congratulate him; ‘The bishops and religious superiors of Zimbabwe are deeply grateful for your training a good number of diocesan and religious priests in the country.’

George always had several ‘wings’ to his work. For years he offered his skills to the demanding task of assessing candidates to the Society and his written judgements were always wise and courteous. He also worked in the library wherever he found himself. What is not so well known is his musical talent. He played the organ at the old Heythrop and collected scores and may have composed some works. Finally, where ever he went he nurtured a garden and even in his last days at Richartz House to which he retired in 2014, he was still caring for plants in his little quad.

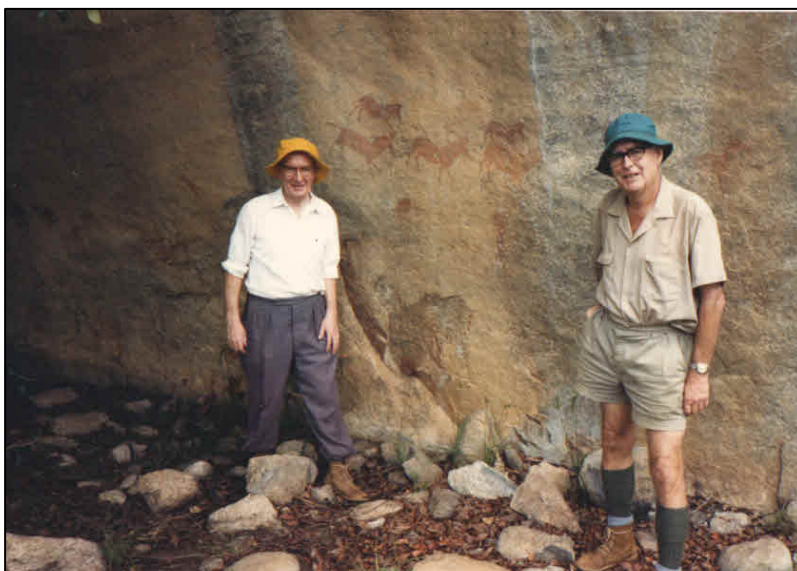
When he was dying, and seemingly unconscious, Fr Nigel Johnson – knowing that hearing is perhaps the last faculty to go - spoke to him of Fr Brendan Callaghan’s appreciation for his

guidance into the field he shared with George: clinical psychology, while George was still in England. Brendan was particularly grateful that George pointed out to him that psychology was not just for curing mental illness but for building up the psychological ‘wholeness’ of ordinary people. Nigel was a little astonished to find George reacting with his characteristic, ‘Thank you for that.’

Brendan later wrote: ‘Along with being my first teacher of psychology, George had mentored my first moves into the area with typical delicacy. He was available and supportive when I needed it: one occasion I recall being when my first-year studies in Oxford (particularly large doses of statistics in pre-personal computer days) were driving me up the wall, and he suggested I should think of them as the equivalent of learning the grammar and vocabulary of a language – boring and apparently unproductive, but necessary in order to get into the literature. But more importantly, he suggested that we did not talk very much about the subject until I had found my own interests, so that I would not be over-influenced by his interests: again, very typically George.’

What kind of person was George Croft? Fidelis, again in the funeral homily, described him as ‘an English gentleman’ and he meant it in a particularly warm way. George was endlessly patient, courteous and never pushed himself forward. He had a twinkle in his eye and a ready sense of humour. One could be totally unaware of his talents and achievements seeing him pottering around his little garden tending his plants.

He died peacefully on this day when, in Zimbabwe, we keep the feast of All Saints, and what is historically the Feast of All Saints and Blessed of the Society of Jesus.



The two brothers,
George always on the left.