



August 1986.

Dear Confrères,

FATHER JOHN FRANCIS VANSTON S.D.B.

After several months of steadily worsening health, God has called Fr. John Vanston to himself at about 8.30 p.m. on Friday, July 4th. in the Holy Spirit Hospital in Bensheim, West Germany.

Fr. John was born on 24th. April 1916 in Bolton and was baptised in the church of St. Edmund in Bolton. His father was a building contractor and, from the very beginning was closely involved with Thornleigh College. His elder brother, Noel was among the first intake and soon John followed him into our school. John was abundantly gifted both intellectually and physically and during his years in the school various careers beckoned him, including an invitation to join Bolton Wanderers Football Club when the Wanderers were one of the leading teams in the country. John, however, chose to follow the quiet voice of his heart and in 1936 joined the pioneer Novices in Beckford where he made his first profession a year later.

The next four years of his life were passed in Cowley, two years as a Student of Philosophy and then two years as a teacher in Battersea/Cowley following its evacuation from London. He completed his Theological studies in Blaisdon and was ordained there on 15th. July 1945 going immediately to Cowley as Headmaster, a post which he held for two years.

From 1947 to 1958 his home was in Battersea. In 1949 he obtained a BA Hons. in English from London University and then taught in the school for the next nine years before returning to Cowley where he held the post of Headmaster for five years. He was Bursar in the same community for a further two years before transferring to Farnborough to be Rector there for a full term of six years.

Through all those years we remember him as a Salesian, strong in mind and body, a gifted and inspiring teacher, a notable linguist, a fine musician and sportsman and an eloquent speaker and leader of men. He dedicated all these fine gifts to the service of the young and his memory is held in high esteem and affection by generations of his past pupils. In November 1985 he was invited by the Past Pupils of Battersea to be the Guest Speaker at their annual reunion. Sadly, he was then recovering from a major operation and could not come to England but he did send them a long letter of apology where, despite his sorrow at being prevented from sharing in their reunion, his wit and eloquence shone through and that letter is now regarded as a precious legacy by the Past Pupils.

The last thirteen years of his life were passed in Bensheim, West Germany where he taught English in the Convent High School and zealously served as an Auxiliary Chaplain to the American Forces based in and around Darmstadt and Heidelberg. When I visited him shortly before he died, I was able to feel the deep gratitude and real affection which surrounded him both in the town and among the American Catholics, a reality made even more evident by the recent award of a rare American Citation for his services to their Forces and for his invaluable work in furthering good German/American relations.

All through his last year he continued to do as much as he could, both in the school and for his American friends. Although recognising very clearly the possibility of an early death he forced himself on, in the hope of a remission or a miracle, "contra spem, in spem credidit". In his letters to me he assured me that he, "had his bags packed", ready for the final journey and, in looking ahead, added the proviso that by September he could well be, "on another shore and in another light".

Now that he has passed to the, "other shore", we pray, through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians, that our loving Saviour will quickly flood him with that, "other light", of promised joys and peace where we all hope to be reunited one day with him and with all our brothers who have gone before.

Please pray for him and for his grieving family.

Yours affectionately in D.B.,

Cyril Kennedy S.D.B. (Provincial)

Data for the Necrology: Fr. John Francis Vanston born in Bolton, England on the 27th April 1916 died in Bensheim, West Germany on the 4th July 1986 at the age of 70 years, after 48 years of Religious Profession and in the 41st year of Priesthood.