

# FATHER MICHAEL BLACKBURN SDB

Michael died peacefully on Friday morning the 11th of July 97 at 10.00am in Frimley Park Hospital.

Michael had been in hospital for over 12 weeks, but the skill, care and devotion of the doctors and nursing staff were unable to cure the effects of a tainted blood transfusion he received in a hip operation some years ago. Michael was 66 years old.

Michael was ordained a priest at Melchet Court in 1960. After a period as Deputy Headteacher at Battersea, he was appointed as Headteacher at Farnborough and led the school admirably for ten years until his return to Battersea in a similar post in 1983. During those years he took the college through a very difficult period of change and growth.

Michael made many friends wherever he went. He played for London Irish Rugby Club in the mid-seventies and retained his love for the game and for the Club down the years. He was the unofficial Chaplain to London Irish Rugby Club.

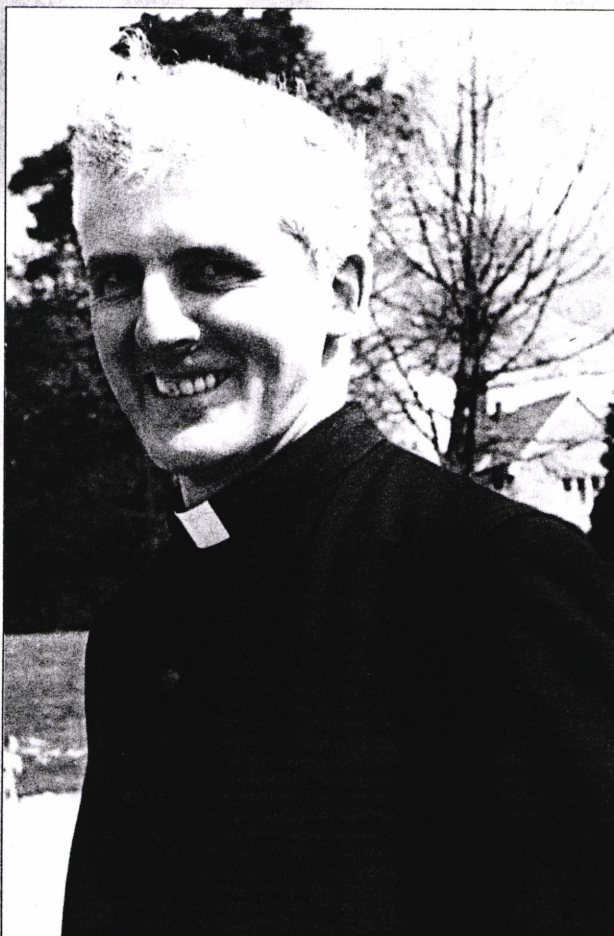
Fr James Gallagher, vice-provincial of the Salesians, reflects on his life -

"The life and death of each of us has its influence on others. We cannot go through life neutral. In our relationships we enrich or impoverish others. In his relationships, Michael had an influence for the good on very many people.

In conversations with others my initial thoughts were reinforced. They too stressed the smile, characteristics, gentleness, kindness, a quiet dignity. Michael was an imposing figure - tall, trim and fit with a full head of hair.

Imposing and dignified yes, yet people always link with these characteristics the adjectives 'gentle' and 'quiet'. I find it difficult to imagine Michael raising his voice to anyone. No doubt he did but very rarely, I imagine.

He had a cheerful open face which invited confidence and he listened. There is a photograph of him which I particularly like. It shows him in the school in Battersea under the famous ambulatory leaning on the fence with a gentle, kindly smile on his face as he listens



to one of the boys who is beside him also leaning on the fence and looking completely at ease. That sums Michael up for me, I feel sure that many colleagues and pupils would be able to multiply such examples. From what I know of Michael in his years as teacher and Headteacher, for many, if not most, of his colleagues he was also a friend.

Certainly, in the times before his last illness there was a twinkle in his eye that spoke of cheerfulness and enjoyment of life. He was a

keen sportsman who enjoyed playing for the London Irish and being with former pupils at their sporting events at Ewell. Michael was no stuffy cleric; he took a full part in the academic, sporting and social life. He mixed with the lads, fellow students, who in turn had a deep respect for and appreciation of him as a priest. In his presence and friendship with them he gave, or rather was, an excellent 'Salesian homily'.

In the last few years before and after his retirement, Michael was tried in the school of illness and pain. Unfortunately, he did not enjoy the energy or the time to relax, to recreate himself after many years of leadership in schools, years in which many changes in education made great demands on him and his staff. It had been his and our hope that he would continue to serve the Salesian mission in a new way, putting to use his many gifts and talents. It was not to be. He served his community of Farnborough as vice-rector, but not for long. It was his community that cared for him in these last months, a source of great comfort to him."

SALESIAN  
BULLETIN

