



## Fr. John Joseph Wiseman SDB.

Fr. John Wiseman was born in Liverpool on the 27th April 1905. He was well into his 84th year when he died on the 2nd of February 1989. Over 68 of those years had been spent in the Salesian Congregation.

Fr. Charles Macey was one of his teachers. Twenty eight years before that Fr. Macey was sent by Don Bosco to begin Salesian work in England.

The young John Wiseman felt this link with Don Bosco keenly.

His Novitiate and early training took place in Cowley.

It was from Cowley that he went on to gain his M.A. in Oxford. His practical training was done in Chertsey and Farnborough. His Theology he did in Battersea and he was ordained in Womersley Seminary on the 10th of June 1933 - as the congregation was preparing for Don Bosco's canonization.

The next twenty-one years were spent in Bolton teaching - the last eleven as Head master. As a Head master he portrayed a formidable, imposing figure always commanding respect. At first most of the children would be dead scared of him. But as they moved up the school he became a great friend. This was especially true of the 'naughty' children. He seemed

to understand them and to have a special place in his heart for them. He loved being with the boys - in the classroom, chatting in his office, with the rambling club on free days for outings; above all, camping

holidays on which he took the older boys and past pupils every year.

He really enjoyed his years in Bolton. A quote from the report of the inspection of 1949 could sum up his work there:-

"The Head Master, Fr. Wiseman, who had previously served on the staff as senior

English master, returned in 1940 to hold his new appointment. His period of office has coincided with the rapid expansion of the School, and under his aegis much has been accomplished. He is enlightened and humane and gives determined and discreet leadership. He is an Honours graduate in English of Oxford University. The developments of the Sixth Form owe much to his sensitive touch and to his skill as a teacher."

1953 brought a big change into his life. He left teaching and started a career as Bursar in Chertsey. For the next 20 years he continued as Bursar in Chertsey, Oxford, Cape Town, Daleside and Lansdowne. He carried out his work with



meticulous care. Every invoice filled and every detail entered. No undertaking was too hard, no obstacle too big, such was his zest and commitment. He would tackle big works and small alike, always looking for perfection. There is many a monument standing to remind future generations of Salesians of Fr. John Wiseman.

In 1973 he retired from Bursar and spent the last 15 years as chaplain to the Augustinian Sisters in Natal at Umgeni Poort.


This last long phase of his life could quite easily have become a lonely semi-retirement; not for Fr. Wiseman - it was a time of very fruitful apostolate. When we had a farewell Mass at the convent for him, all those present could regard themselves as his personal friends. Standing at the door of his cottage in the woods you soon take in his enormous vitality - the garden, the roses, the workshop, the furniture, the books, notes, files and correspondence; an energy that poured into the lives of others near and far, sharing his faith, his joy and his living. He seemed to be able to take into his person with a childlike simplicity the whole of reality around him, people, nature, books, learning and culture. He was gifted in being able to share this richness with his friends. John Wiseman was a minister of friendship, a bubbling exciting friendship. Even seclusion among the woods and hills of

Natal was no obstacle - it was an opportunity - to create and build a wide circle of friendship.

He appreciated his time in Natal. He used his time to the full. But he also grew closer to God in prayer. He remembered daily his Salesian confreres both living and dead and all his friends. The Sisters appreciated his devotion to religious duties. He loved the mass deeply. He said this love was growing stronger with the years. He felt it a great honour to have had mass on the Feast of St. John Bosco with Fr. Vincent Ford - one of his past pupils and friend.

He was well prepared for death which came on the feast of the Presentation. He too had offered his life - 68 years as a Salesian - to the Father. He once remarked "there are no characters left in the Society, old man." How wrong he was - we have just lost a unique character in Fr. Wiseman.

As he remembered us in his daily prayers let us not forget him in death. R.I.P.

*Pat Naughton* 

Fr. Patrick Naughton (Rector)