



Salesian College,
Battersea,
London, SW11 3PB

1st July, 1978

Dear Confrères,

Only twenty-four hours — almost to the minute — had elapsed since the death of our dear Father McKeown when, in God's all-seeing Wisdom, the soul of

REV. FATHER THOMAS GERARD DULLEHAN, S.D.B.

also of this community, was called into the presence of the Lord. This double loss is a heavy cross to bear, but we are happy, once again to be able to testify that our good friend went strengthened by all those graces which Holy Church joyfully offers us in our hour of greatest need. May he rest in peace!

The First World War was still in progress, and conditions at Battersea and elsewhere were hard when, in the autumn of 1917, Thomas Dullehan arrived here, at the age of fourteen, to commence his studies as a pupil at the college and as an aspirant. He had come from his native Liverpool — from the parish so happily-named of St. Francis of Sales — and he came, tough in constitution and in the Faith, from a dockland city where men were truly men. 'Tom' was, throughout his life, a fearless fighter for God and for Holy Church. Indeed, in any sphere, he was a fearless adversary but, under his toughness, was the heart of a warm, hard-working and gentle friend.

He soon made his mark in the school as both student and sportsman, and these same gifts accompanied him when he joined the first post-war novitiate at Burwash on September 9th, 1919. He was one of that record novitiate, several of whose members had just come from the trenches in France, and whose boast it always has been that ten of us started and eleven were professed! He himself was professed in November 1920, and, in the following Spring, went to the newly-opened House of Studies and Novitiate at Cowley, Oxford. He was perpetually professed there on the feast of Our Lady's Presentation 1923. Maybe there was something very providential in his being one of the first band of Salesians at Cowley. There was, apart from the study of philosophy, etc., the terribly demanding labour of levelling the playground-to-be, digging hard and carting mountains of soil. It was a test both for one's physical powers and for one's vocation. He survived!

Those who had been trained in the First World War years of Battersea had had the privilege of being with some very great early Salesians and 'Founding Fathers' of the English Province. They had, especially, learned to love and revere Father Macey, to whom, under God, so many priests, Salesian and secular, owed their vocations. No-one had at heart a more genuine sense of gratitude and devotion to him than Thomas Dullehan. It was, therefore, a particular joy when, as a young cleric, he was sent to Chertsey to help him.

It was back to Cowley in 1923 and 24 to continue his teaching and to finish his philosophy. Theology followed, first at Battersea and then, from 1926-30, in Turin where he also edited the English 'Salesian Bulletin.' Here, his gift for languages showed itself to advantage and was a distinct aid to him in dealing with the errors of Italian printers in the matter of his native English. He was ordained by Cardinal Gamba in Turin on 18th May, 1929.

On his return to England in 1930, teaching occupied most of his life and energy. Most of the following years were spent in our schools at Battersea, Farnborough and Chertsey. At Chertsey he was Prefect of Studies from 1940-43. He was associated with the wartime Battersea evacuation to Cowley and, later again, from 1959-62, was Bursar at Cowley. He had also a short spell at Burwash. His determination and his physical strength were put to good use by the Superiors in the difficult days of the beginnings of the evacuation already mentioned, and in the years 1962-66, in connection with the preparatory work for the opening of the college at Bootle.

The war years provided him with an apostolate for which he was well-equipped; a chaplaincy to the Royal Air Force. He filled this post for two spells of service; from 1943-49 and from 1951-59. As priest and as sportsman, he had much that he could profitably give to men in such times of need. He served both at home and overseas.

It was in the latter part of his life that an opportunity came which showed him at his best. It was as a pastor of souls on his appointment in 1967 as parish priest of the Sacred Heart parish, Battersea. He loved the people and the people loved him. He was, in so many ways, the 'Poor Man's Friend.' His interest and his generosity were heart-warming. During his term as parish priest, 1967-72, great changes had to take place as a consequence of Vatican II. At Battersea, this involved, among other things, great structural alterations to the sanctuary of the church, as well as the re-decoration of the whole church. It was a daunting task!

P.T.O.

To appreciate this, one must remember the historic character of the Battersea church, modelled as it is on that of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, and having close links with Don Rua, Cardinal Cagliero and other great figures in the Salesian story. Fr. Dullehan tackled the job undaunted by the criticism which he realised would come. The reredos disappeared but a lovely and more spacious sanctuary came into being. He also erected the new side-chapel of Don Bosco and the Salesian saints. What he did, he did with all his heart, and that might well be a good verdict on his life! The late Archbishop Cowderoy (R.I.P.) undoubtedly admired his energy and his zeal. He is known to have told some of his diocesan priests who were worried as to what was possible in the re-arrangement of their sanctuaries: "Go and see what the Salesians have done at Battersea!"

Ill-health began to make itself felt and, in 1972, Father Dullehan retired as parish priest. He continued for some years to act as an assistant priest, but, finally, had to give way. It was after a long and painful illness that he went to his reward.

In spite of his toughness, he was, in many ways, very shy. One had to live with him for some years to discover the quality of this genuinely good and priestly man. His older brethren were in the best position to evaluate his worth. It is certainly in the hearts of the simple parishioners of Battersea that "his memory will," as Scripture says, "be held in veneration."

We and they shall pray for him. We ask you, in your brotherly charity, to join us, and may the peace of God, through Mary most holy, be with you all.

Your sincerely in Don Bosco,
Fr. Austin Malloy, S.D.B.
Rector.

Data for the Necrology: Rev. Father Thomas Gerard Dullehan, S.D.B., born Liverpool (Lancs) 20.10.1902. Perp. professed 21.11.23. Ordained at Turin 18.5.29. Died Battersea (London) 26.6.78

R.I.P.