

FATHER CHARLES HENRY KEYTE. S. D. B.

Father Charles Keyte, one of the best known and best loved Salesians in the Province, died quite suddenly at the age of 66 on Thursday, 28th July, at St. Anthony's Hospital, Cheam, where he had gone a few days previously for observation. He had received Holy Communion about an hour before his death and he had been walking around in apparently good form.

He had, however, been in indifferent health for the last few years but he had managed to keep going for most of the time, to work steadily on behalf especially of the cooperators and friends of Battersea, and generally to continue a rich and full community life. Always hard-working, always the soul of kindness, with a joke, a cheery smile and a word of encouragement and praise on his lips, he was everybody's friend and not least of all, we feel, the friend of God. He loved to talk with a sincerity, a simplicity and an earnestness that was an envy of us all of Our Dear Blessed Lady, as he invariably termed her, of St. John Bosco, of all things that were good, and of "dear old Battersea" which to him was surely the nearest thing to heaven on earth that he knew. He loved every brick, every flower and tree of the house which he had known as his home for so many years and whose welfare was so important to him. Particularly did he love the little chapel, for the enlargement, decoration and beautifying of which he had done so much. To him we owe its beautiful high altar, the stained glass window of Mary, Help of Christians, and much else. Always he saw battersea in terms of the prophecy of Don Bosco and he did all in his power to see that prophecy brought to fulfilment.

Yet, though Battersea meant so much to him, his love was not a narrow one; all things and places, as well as persons, Salesian were dear to him and he rejoiced sincerely in the advancement of every house.

His heroic work at battersea during the Second World War, when he kept the flag flying during the absence of the community at Cowley and when, in some marvellous manner that no one has yet solved, he contrived to make the most impressive alterations and improvements is a byword in the province. Not only did the buidings suffer no loss but they wer enhanced and the end of the war found the college, thanks to Fr. Keyte, in first-class condition for re-occupation.

For many years he had charge of the Old Boys' Association and, during his period as its director, it had advanced by leaps and bounds. He knew hundreds of past-pupils – they loved him and he loved them – and he had always, until the end of his life, the hand of friendship and fatherly goodness extended to greet and help them. Indeed with every class of person, and notably with the poor, the lowly and the downtrodden, he was an "alter Christus" God bless him. Every morning he said Mass for the Sisters in their private chapel; he was deeply conscious of all the good they performed; their interests were close to his heart. Charles Keyte came to Battersea as a student in 1909 and, with the exception of the years 1911–14, when he made his novitiate and did his philosophical studies at Burwash, and the years 1921–4 and 1925–28, when he served successively at Chertsey and at St. Patrick's Malta, as Catechist, Battersea was his home.

A member of a well-known Warwickshire family which had very strong ecclesiastical connections – one of his cousins was the Auxiliary bishop of Birmingham (Bishop Bright) – he had a natural piety and courtesy, allied to considerable ability as a sportsman, which fitted him eminently for Salesian life. One remembers him well for his devoted work in the classroom and dormitory and as chapel sacristan in the years before and immediately after his ordination, which took place at Battersea on the 6th March 1921. The officiating prelate was Archbishop Amigo.

For a number of years he was Provincial Economer and also the bursar at Battersea.

He had entered hospital for observation only four days before his death. At the time four members of the community were in the hospital and they tell us that, on that last morning, Fr. Keyte was in apparently splendid form, happy and cheerful. All four received Holy Communion together and, afterwards, Fr. Keyte put everything away and saw that all was in order. An hour or so later he decided to have a bath and it was apparently as he was dressing once again that he was struck down with coronary thrombosis and died. Fr. McGrath who was one of those in the hospital on that occasion, went and anointed him, but life was probably already extinct. Father Keyte's remains rested in the chapel sanctuary at Battersea on the night of the 1st-2nd August. On the morning of the 2nd they were removed to the Sacred Heart Church and there Solemn Requiem Mass was sung by the Rector in the presence of many Salesians and friends. Fr. Provincial gave the panegyric and, later that same day, in the cemetery at Burwash, Fr. Keyte was laid to rest.

R. I. P.