

Memories of Fr. Bernard Keaton C.Ss.R

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Fr. Bernard Keaton died in Hawkstone in 1970

Bernard Keaton was born shortly before the beginning of the century and he joined the junior seminary which was then at Bishop Eton, though the boys in the seminary were not taught at Bishop Eton. In those days before the First World War they went to St. Francis Xavier College which was down town in Liverpool not in Woolton where it is at present but the original St. Francis Xavier's.

Fr. Keaton who gradually became name as Buster Keaton because of a contemporary comedian of the same name. He was taken up with much with the notion of enlisting in the army to fight during the First World War. And he went as soon as he could, joining strangely for such an Englishman, the Dublin Fusiliers. The reason he joined the Dublin Fusiliers was that they accepted people of seventeen where as other regiments would take them only when they had turned eighteen. So he joined the Dublin Fusiliers, and he went through the war, fortunately for him, without being injured in any way.

After the war, when he was demobbed, he went to the novitiate, was professed and ordained, and he must have been a missionary for a short time but he fairly soon was sent to Rome to study scripture. He came back and taught scripture at Hawkstone. Unfortunately there was some clash of personalities on the staff and he was taken out of Hawkstone, sent to Bishop Eton I think in 1935 for about a year and then sent to South Africa, and he had no chance of any scripture work during all that time.

He was in South Africa right through the Second World War coming back in 1947, when he tried to take up scripture again. And he taught scripture in that time till shortly before his death in 1970. But the interesting thing was the reputation he had amongst scripture scholars in England. There was one Fr. Alexander Jones, who I think translated, and certainly edited editions of the Jerusalem Bible, and he said to me and to a number of other Redemptorists, how much the Redemptorists had to accept responsibility in moving Fr. Keaton out of Hawkstone and sending him to South Africa. He said he was acknowledged by all who had been in Rome with him, as the leading scripture scholar in England, and the Redemptorists ruined that career for him by sending him at that particular age to South Africa.

Bernard was a keen gardener, and all the time certainly from 1947 onwards while he was teaching scripture that time at Hawkstone, he was very keen on looking after, first clearing up the rockery in the garden by the pond in the garden, the lily pond and then keeping it in good condition. And one day a discussion started in his presence as to what constituted servile work on Sunday in the garden, and he very quickly came up with the answer heavy work like using a mowing machine, or using a spade to dig with, that's servile work and is forbidden on a Sunday, but delicate work like I do on the rockery with a hand trowel, little hand fork – that's not gardening that's horticulture and that is allowed on a Sunday because its not servile work but a virtue.