

Memories of Fr. John Howard C.Ss.R

Published: 26 May
2014

by Fr. Beverley Ahearn C.Ss.R

Fr. John Howard died in Erdington, Birmingham in 1960.

He had been appointed to Hawkstone when Fr. Haig was getting old and weak in health. Fr Haig had been students' confessor, and so Fr. Howard was sent there as students' confessor to help and eventually take the place of Fr. Haig.

He made a big contribution outside his work as confessor, by the beehives that he kept and multiplying the number of beehives we had, and teaching students how to look after the bees so that when he got too old, someone was able to take care of the bees.

He stayed in Hawkstone until about mid-1960, when work was going to begin on the old Hawkstone as we had it then, converting some of the inside and rebuilding the north wing. Some of the community was moved away and Fr. Howard was moved to Birmingham, where he did not last very long, but he died very suddenly, just found dead on the Feast of the Holy Innocents 1960.

Because of the nature of his death the police had to make enquiries and a police constable and a woman police constable arrived during dinner looking for the Rector, to take a statement and to examine Fr. Howard's room.

And while they were doing this the woman constable was querying Fr. Chris Harris, who was the Rector, about enemies that Fr Howard might have had. And he was puzzled because he said Fr. Howard didn't have any enemies. And she said well it sounds very much like it, I mean just listen to the sound, the sound of a party going on in the background. All they all having a meal and drinking and he only died this morning. It would seem rather they were rejoicing at the death of an enemy.

So Fr. Harris was at pains to point out the notion of death, that we could celebrate a man's life, and celebrate a man's life with joy, that it wasn't a question of rejoicing over an enemy but rejoicing over a life well lived.

And so he avoided arrest by the two police people and they went off satisfied.