

FR MARTIN HAIGH OSB 1922-2015

FR FELIX STEPHENS OSB

Anthony Haigh born 17 January 1922 in London; educated at Ampleforth; Clothed 22 September 1940; ordained 17 July 1949; 1943-46 Oxford studying French and Art; 1947-1981 Art Master and teaching French; 1948-1963 Games Master; 1951 Started lecturing on the Shroud of Turin; Sent a Crucifix to John Hunt which was placed on Everest in 1953; 1953 Started the Ampleforth Pilgrimage to Lourdes with Fr Basil Hume; 1963-1977 Housemaster St Bede's; 1978 Monastic Guestmaster; 1979-1981 Gilling Parish; 1981-1997 Grassendale Parish; 1997 Ampleforth Parish; 2001-2006 Leyland Parish; 2006 Returned to Ampleforth; died 31 January 2015 in the Monastery Infirmary.



LIKE SEVERAL OF his brethren, Fr Martin's life as a monk from 1940 to 2015 is divided between a career in the College 1946-77 and years as a pastor in a parish 1981-2006. Education was in St Edward's House under the watchful eye of his fellow artist Fr Raphael Williams. Anthony Haigh joined the monastery in 1940 alongside his friend George Hume (Fr Basil) and took the name Martin in honour of St Tèrese Martin, the 19th century Saint of Lisieux. Fr Martin's simplicity of faith and devotion, uncluttered by theological niceties, fitted neatly into the spirit of St Tèrese of Lisieux. All

with whom he came into contact whether in the monastery, the College, outside contacts, the Lourdes fraternity, and those on the parishes were left in no doubt about his sincerity and devotion to the monastic and priestly way of life.

At Oxford he read French and Art, played Greyhound Rugby vs Cambridge in 1943 and 1944, and turned out for the 1945 All Blacks when they played at Oxford arriving a man short and with only 15 All Black shirts. He had to return his shirt. He was not alone in discovering that the 'gammy knee' which plagued him thereafter was the result of his frail physique encountering the physical force of rugby. Back from Oxford at the age of 24 and with four years of theology ahead of him he was thrust into the mainstream of College life as Games Master with his Games Room at the central hub of College life. He held the post for 17 years. As well as organising games four times a week for between 450 and 550 boys, he arranged school fixtures for all teams and hosted and visited other schools as coach for Colts XV and 1st XI cricket. He was a superb ambassador for the College, not least in welcoming sporting

visitors but also building relationships with the staff of other schools, including North Yorkshire State schools, RAF Cranwell, and Catterick Garrison for cricket, and the Headingley club for rugby.

He was also responsible for the building of 16 tennis courts, and the further development of athletics at the behest of his friend Geoff Dyson, the National Athletics coach of the day. For a time in vacation he also undertook coaching cricket at Lilleshall National Recreation Centre. Unlike his friend Fr Basil, a passionate supporter of teams (such as Newcastle United), Fr Martin had no such interest in a team to support. What mattered to him was quality: of talent, technique, performance. Results were secondary; the search for perfection uppermost. Hence he was able to move away from the sporting stage with ease when he became Housemaster of St Bede's on the election of Fr Basil as Abbot in 1963.

Fr Martin's influence in the years 1946 to 1977 was vast and varied: for 30 years a teacher of 'O' level French, master in charge of Art (a post he held for 35 years), Commanding Officer No 2 Company in the CCF until 1963, these were just other parts of the CV in the life of a monk who was ever faithful to the choir and the community. Many will recall his regular role as deputy cantor to Fr Denis Waddilove or Fr Oswald Vanheems at Sunday Vespers, then always attended by the College. They will recall other skills: the annual shrovetide entertainment in the Theatre, a double act with Fr Basil, and his regular update about 'Alphonse,' a little Chaplinesque moustache and a bit of slapstick. The Theatre was also the venue for his Art appreciation lectures to the Sixth Form, beautifully crafted, annually renewed, appreciated and enjoyed. Less enthusiastically received but part of the handing on of skills, perfectly formed, was the summoning of all new boys in September to the Theatre for a lecture on how to pass a rugby ball. No one was left in doubt as to its importance, explained as it was with expert exactitude.

Meanwhile, Fr Martin and Fr Basil had inaugurated the Lourdes Pilgrimage in 1952, and for 25 years and more Fr Martin remained the inspiration and the organiser for what has grown to be a shining light in the calendar of the Abbey, College parents and supporters. It is true that for some six months beforehand conversation always seemed to end up with the problems and the extent of the organisation but it was indeed a complex structure early on until others moved in, as they did, to take on much of the burden. Not content with Lourdes, Fr Martin expanded what might be gently termed his obsessions with his lecture on the Shroud of Turin, and the lecture on the story of how he persuaded Sir John Hunt to place a crucifix on the top of Mount Everest in 1953. The last two were re-thought, developed and delivered for over 50 years to whosoever could be galvanised into providing an audience. Above all, perhaps, was his devotion to painting, a life-long passion. Some 177 paintings survive, all much loved by their author/creator, not all always thus appreciated by the

viewer, whether monk or lay in the well-honed tradition of art criticism. And Fr Martin was very clear with regard to his own views. Fr Abbot, in his homily, commented that 'he found it difficult to part with his children because that, I believe, is what his paintings were.' All these many interests were, as Fr Abbot attested 'abiding passions...seeking a perfection in this life which somehow eluded his grasp.'

In 1963 Fr Martin took over St Bede's House and was thus part of the official administration of the College until 1977. He was less leader as authority figure (although he often needed to be), but rather inspirer of individuality. In the House he cared for individuals, was appreciated by so many for his talents, idiosyncrasies, friendships, charisma, yes and his obsessions. St Bede's under Fr Martin retained an easy going natural informality allowing for development of personality and a strength of character formed under the eagle eye of the spirituality and personal example of monastic life.

Before moving to St Austin's Grassendale, Liverpool, in 1981, Fr Martin had a spell as Monastery Junior Master and Guestmaster in the Grange. Such transitions, after over 30 heady years of total involvement in the College a mere 100 yards away, are not easy. The second career, if it can be called that, of parish life gave him the chance to exercise his pastoral care of families of parishioners, young and old, together with his parish priest Fr Benedict Webb who had been alongside him for those 13 years on Aumit Hill as Housemaster of St Hugh's. In the parish he had space to breathe anew, to exercise his gifts upon a new audience, a new lease of life. St Austin's in South Liverpool was ideally placed for him. Founded in 1837, St Austin's was looked after by monks of Ampleforth for all but two years of its life until its final closure by the Archbishop in May 2015. Painting flourished and Fr Martin was granted an Exhibition of his portfolio by the Dean in the Giles Scott's Anglican Cathedral. The large and successful primary school, one of the best, brought out Fr Martin's gifts as a chaplain and provided the seed corn for his Sunday children's liturgies, a role he maintained for himself for all of 16 years. No liturgist or rubician but always plagued by perfection and attention to detail, his ceremonies were conceived and prepared in minute thoroughness, papers strewn all over his room in, for example, the Lenten weeks, leading up to Holy Week. What had been in the past preparation for the Lourdes pilgrimage was now preparation and discussion of Holy Week. He was in his element with families and their children and ever aware of the old and sick who needed care and a visit.

At the age of 75 he returned to the Abbey, but by now while still relatively active in mind he needed the freedom of a parish and from 2002-2006 he was in Leyland, Lancashire. In November 2006 he telephoned Fr Abbot to say he was unwell and would return to the monastery that afternoon. An aortic aneurysm required

immediate surgery after which in the final years of his life he painted when he could and prepared himself for death. Diagnosed finally with leukaemia he refused treatment preferring to decline gracefully surrounded by his brethren. On the morning of 31st January 2015 he called his carers to his room and thanked them for looking after him. Then he let go and died that afternoon in the 75th year of his religious life, a life of talent, energy, variety and above all of witness to simplicity of faith and devotion to the Eucharist and Our Lady of Lourdes.