

Obituary of (James) Michael Pocock (C1 1942-46)

(James) Michael Pocock (C1 1942-46), younger brother of the late Anthony Pocock OBE (C1 1936-41), died in hospital on September 16th 2010. Aged 82, he had retired only 4 years previously, after a lifelong teaching ministry in African countries: 1950-60 Achimota College, Ghana, becoming Vice-Principal; 1960-64 Government Education Department, Northern Nigeria; 1965-77 Southern Rhodesia, initially at Bernard Mizeki College, and in 1967 appointed the pioneer Headmaster of St Mary Magdalene's School, Inyanga. There it was his misfortune to antagonise the 'Smith UDI' regime; he was arrested and deported at the same time as a Roman Catholic missionary priest, having no connection with Michael, suffered the same fate.

In 1978 Michael was back in Africa, in Botswana at the international school Marua Pula; and in 1979 he moved on to Lesotho, settling down at St Stephen's High School, Mohale's Hoek, where he was to stay for 27 years, the last 21 of them as Headmaster. He became greatly respected, both within and beyond the school. He had a 'presence', yet remained ever friendly and approachable. He was versatile: English Literature being his preferred subject, if the need arose he would teach Bible Knowledge, Economics, History or Geography or indeed any subject other than Mathematics and the Sciences!

When he became Headmaster it was hard to get him to reduce the number of lessons that he taught per week, cf a postcard from the Priory in Johannesburg, where he regularly stayed with the Mirfield Fathers, June 2004, Michael then aged 74: 'The end of term was conducted at high pressure; 625 reports completed and posted on the night of June 4th, and Mike Fullbright and I left on the 5th at 0615'.

He remained celibate, dedicating himself first and foremost to his pupils. He joined the Club in Mohale's Hoek for no personal benefit other than access to the tennis courts, and to use them he took along senior boys and girls from the school as his guests. Similarly, for occasional short holiday breaks either within Lesotho or in neighbouring countries, he and Mike Fullbright (an American colleague) would often be accompanied by several senior boys.

St Stephen's had limited boarding facilities, and he took the initiative of sharing the Headmaster's house with no less than 18 boys – courtesy of bunk-beds! The most senior chose to stay in the annexe, to which they inappropriately but good-humouredly gave the name Robben Island. Michael insisted on always cooking the evening meal himself, while washing-up was the boys' responsibility, before everyone settled into the strict silence of homework. They would also arrange and clear away breakfast, by which time the Headmaster would have completed several hours in the school office.

Michael's patient care extended to all the teaching staff as well as the school cooks, livestock carers and night-watchmen: cf a postcard written during a very happy return visit to Mohale's Hoek, October 2007 – 'I know more people in this town than in the whole of the UK. It's something to ponder'.

He maintained a voluminous correspondence, mainly by postcards, keeping in touch with a great number of pupils from his former schools. And during the annual long holiday, by means of carefully planned 'stopovers' in the journey to UK from Johannesburg, he would often stay a few days in their homes, especially in Zimbabwe. He also kept in close touch with several MC contemporaries and with many former teaching colleagues.

Cont...

During the 'Pocock' years the school's academic rating rose steadily, so that St Stephen's came to rank consistently among the top 3 or 4 schools in Lesotho. In a postcard dated 23.2.06 sent from his retirement home in Cumbria within a few weeks of finally leaving Mohale's Hoelk, Michael noted: 'The School Certificate results have reached me. They were, I think, the best ever, as I had hoped. A good final paragraph'.

[We are greatly indebted for his enthusiastic assistance to the Revd Anthony Gann, Editor of the Lesotho Diocesan Association newsletter in the compilation of this obituary].

Rev JG Harford (C2 1943-47)

In glad and affectionate memory
of JMP*

From the first and final stanzas of Song of the Inn, 1843-1943, written 8th May 1943 by the College Librarian, HAV Ransom:

Here you can never stay
When you have had your day.
Bide your time – love the more –
Settle the score
And go your way.
This is the Inn
.....
.....
And the score? – no purse has paid it yet:
In souls of men is the reckoning set.
.....
This is the Inn.

* for whom The Inn, surviving as C1 and the Adderley, was a second, albeit temporary home for nearly five years.