

S T . P A T R I C K ' S   C O L L E G E

S O M E R E M I N I S C E N S E S   O F   P A S T   R E C T O R S .

Founded by Mgr. Bettachchini in 1850 with the name of Jaffna Catholic English School, St. Patrick's derived its current name in 1881. From then onwards, Catholic Missionaries spared no efforts to make it the premier Catholic Educational Institution in the North, if not the whole island. Its first Principal was in fact, a layman Mr. Patrick Foy. After him, beginning from 1861, until now, Catholic Priests have been guiding the destinies of the College as Rectors. This piece mainly relates to two prominent Rectors who had brought fame and prestige to the College.

Rev. Fr. Charles S Matthews OMI	
	1905 – 1921 & 1924 - 1936

Rev. Fr. Timothy M.F. Long OMI	
	1936 - 1954

When I joined St.Patrick's in January 1949, Fr. T.M.F.Long was its Rector. I could remember my first sight of him on the day an admission test was held. There he was on the stage in the study hall along with one of the teachers, Mr. B.R.Motha who was assisting him. He looked stately, tall and elegant, neatly attired in a white cassock, a very impressive personality. I was given admission to Form VIII (Junior School Certificate class). He would be there at the quadrangle in the mornings where all the Catholic students assemble, to lead them in prayer. If there are any public announcements, he would summon all the students to the quadrangle and address them, but we rarely saw him otherwise.

The Middle Grades of which Form VIII was a part was under the immediate charge of Fr. Chas. S.Mathews who had the title of 'Prefect of Studies- Middle Grades'. In January 1950 I moved to the Pre Senior Form which came directly under Fr. Long. Fr. B.A.John was the Vice Rector at that time.

I was lodged in the Hindu Boarding housed in the three storied Mathews Block facing the school grounds. We could see another large building being put up adjoining this block and by 1951 a new three storied one had sprung up. Catholic Hostellers who had until then been lodged in a building adjoining St.Martin's Seminary down Main Street moved to this new building. There were Priests who functioned

as Wardens for both the hostels but we could see that it was Fr. Long who was virtually in overall charge, because there were vast changes in the manner hostels were being managed.

Immediately after morning Holy Mass which all Catholic students had to attend, all the students must get into the grounds to do some physical training for around 20 minutes. We have to take our baths after this routine and then run to catch one of the fifteen or so showers that were there. Rest will have to take their baths from the clean water collected in two large tubs. We then hurry to do our change, go to the dining hall to have breakfast and come back again to the study hall for a half hour of studies prior to moving to the classes.

In the evenings, after returning from the classes, we will have tea and then change and must get into the ground and take part in some form of sport for an hour or so. There were a few students who did not relish getting into the grounds and Fr. Long had observed them. There was a public announcement that these few who were named must also partake in some form of sport, at least a brisk walk. One of them happened to be the son of the Government Agent of the Northern Province at that time.

The quality of the food that was served to the hostellers at all times improved very much and we were compelled to use fork and spoon during meals instead of our hands. In an assembly, Fr. Long brought a fork, a spoon and a table knife and showed how we should use them explaining that it was a hygienic form of eating. Noticing that the bathrooms and toilets were not being kept clean he admonished the hostellers and wanted us to use them keeping in mind that it is common property to be used by all. The Hostel Prefects were given additional responsibilities and had to prove themselves.

Fr. Long himself used to take part in a game of 'Badminton' or 'Tenecoite' with one of the Senior students. Tenecoite is a simple game where a rigid rubber rings around 6" in diameter is thrown between two opposing players without letting it fall to the ground. Some of us used to sneak to watch him play and we found that although very much senior he was as good as the young student.

Father Long's tenure as Rector beginning from 1936 could be termed a glorious one as the college rose to great heights in every sphere, education, sports, extra-curricular activities like dramas, cadetting, scouting etc. Religion was given a pride of place as Fr. Long was a priest of immense faith. There were annual Retreats compulsory for all Catholic students during which we had to observe strict silence. Multifarious activities like Passion Plays, Drama Contests were organized and there was one notable South Indian Carnatic Musician and Film Star brought in to give a recital which attracted thousands from all over the Peninsula. A Carnival and Exhibition was also organized in 1953 which was a huge success.

The College Library was improved to unprecedented levels with hundreds of books and magazines being added regularly. It earned the reputation as one of the best, if not the best, in the whole island. Having achieved this, Fr. Long thought of doing something in the Social Development field as well and conceived the idea of establishing a 'Public Library' in Jaffna Town. He spearheaded and worked on it first erecting a large building and then equipping it comprehensively. On completion, this turned out to be a masterpiece. The people of Jaffna did not forget him and erected a tall statue of his in front of the Library. Alas, years later, it was burnt down during the civil strife and thank God, Father Long was not there to view its demolition.

Discipline was uppermost for Fr. Long and he enforced it strictly. In fact St. Patrick's came to be known as a Reformatory school for recalcitrant children and many parents from the South admitted their children to reform them. During his early days as Rector, we came to know that he would use the cane liberally but in later days this punishment was passed on to the Headmaster. It was the same Fr. Long who finally burnt the 'cane' publicly and gave it a decent farewell never to be used in the College again. Beneath his stern exterior, he had a benevolent and gentle heart and had the welfare of each and every student in the college at all times.

Fr. Long came to be respected by all sections of the society and he definitely had the ears of the powers that be at that time. Recognition, however, came to him long after he passed away in the form of a commemorative Stamp issued by the Government enshrining him as a 'National Hero' for the educational contribution he had made to the country.

in early 1953, Fr. Long decided to emigrate to Australia much to the consternation of students, teachers as well as the general public. Although the actual reasons for his sudden decision were not publicized, rumours had it that he had some differences with the then Bishop of Jaffna in regard to the further development of the College and he felt he could continue no longer. He was given a fitting and unforgettable farewell not only by the students but the people of Jaffna. He had left an indelible impression not only on all the students who had passed through his hands but also the general public who held him in high respect.

He passed away peacefully on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1961 in Australia and we are sure he would have been received by Jesus in Heaven straightaway.

Fr. Long's immediate predecessor was Fr. Chas. S. Mathews who in fact functioned as Rector during two terms. After completing his University education in Canada, he came to the island and joined as a Teacher at St. Patrick's in 1903. The Rector at that time was Chas. Beaud who had expanded the college by putting additional buildings. On his sudden death in 1905, Fr. Mathews took over as Rector and held this position till 1921 when he left for Europe on furlough. Fr. Mathews was a visionary and in fact laid the foundation for the "Greater St. Patrick's" that was to emerge later. He reorganized and regulated the school activities with the result St. Patrick's began to shine in academic studies as well as in sports and other activities. He instituted a Pension Scheme for the school staff,. He also erected a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the quadrangle where all students would assemble in the mornings to say prayers before the daily classes start. Most importantly, he threw open the college to students from all levels of society enabling many from the lower strata of society and poor families to get the benefit of a decent College education. Bursaries were granted to students from families who could not afford to pay for their children's' education.

When he left to Europe in 1921, he was succeeded by Fr. Guyomar who had the distinction of earning a double "First Class' in the Cambridge Tripos. He was considered one of the few learned men in the country at that time. On his being chosen as the Bishop of Jaffna in 1926, Fr. Mathews who had returned from Europe took over as Rector once again. Fr. Mathews' second term lasted till 1936 when Fr. Long who had joined as a Teacher took over. During the twelve years Fr. Mathews functioned as Rector, the

College advanced to unprecedented levels in all spheres. At the London Matriculation Examination for three consecutive years, St. Patrick's obtained the best results in the whole British Empire. Not merely in academic studies, the College progressed in all forms of sports. The college emerged as champions in cricket, soccer and athletics for many years during this period.

New buildings were put up, large numbers of students were admitted, a fully equipped Science and Chemistry Laboratory was established, and Library expanded. An elegant College Chapel was also put up. A separate power house was also built to serve the needs of the College. In short, Fr. Mathews pioneered what Fr. Long accomplished later.

On the assumption of duties as Rector by Fr. Long, Fr. Mathews assumed duties as Rector of St. Henry's College, Ilavalai. Up to that time, St. Henry's was managed by the Christian Brothers and the Jaffna Diocese took over the management in that year and appointed Fr. Mathews. Fr. Mathews held this position until 1943 when Fr. P.J.Jeevaratnam took over. Fr. Mathews was in retirement until 1947 when he was brought back again to St. Patrick's this time as 'Prefect of Studies, Middle School. When I joined Form VII I in 1949, it was part of the Middle School and came under Fr. Mathews. I remember meeting him regularly outside school hours and he was always gentle and kind. In 1952, he celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his Priesthood and by then had also completed 50 years of service as an educationist in the North, mostly at St. Patrick's.

Fr. Mathews spent the next few years as 'Chaplain' at the Ampitiya National Seminary (Kandy District) but returned to the Jaffna District in 1954. Having retired from active service, he chose to reside in the precincts of St. Henry's College, Ilavalai. When I was employed in Colombo and visited the North, I would drop to see him at Ilavalai and it was always a delightful meeting. He would receive me kindly and will talk of his old times. He passed away in the late fifties, the exact year of which I now forget. Well done, true and faithful servant of Christ.

Both Frs. Long and Mathews have contributed immensely to the development of St. Patrick's. However I am in no way detracting from or undermining the contributions to the College by their successors. In fact they, all sons of the soil, faced tremendous difficulties all of which were and are being successfully overcome. I will follow up with another piece to cover their tenures.

Nothing gives us, those of an earlier era, more pleasure than to read and hear of the successes of the present day students at St. Patrick's.

Benedict Thomas

(Benny)