

17 January

Fr PETER BONTEMPS 15 February 1870 – 17 January 1955

Peter Bontemps was born in France (Marley, Valenciennes), trained in South Africa, and worked there, Zimbabwe, Belgium and England. He entered the novitiate at Graaf Reinet in 1886 and started his philosophy in Dunbrody in 1888 before going to Europe to complete his studies at Enghien and then, for theology, St Beuno's in Wales.



Returning to Southern Africa he served in Uitenhage, Grahamstown parish, Keilands, Empanjeni, Gwelo, Umtali and Mzondo mission which moved in his time to Gokomere. He knew Xhosa well and amazed people at Empanjeni by being able to preach in the sister language, Ndebele, after only a few weeks at the mission. After 25 years at these different places, he developed heart trouble and was sent to England to recover. He seems to have recovered well as he spent the next 25 years in a variety of parishes ending up for many years in Preston.

He was deeply appreciated wherever he went, especially for his visiting of people in their homes. He would keep records of every family, including where they came from and where they went if they left. The bishop was astonished at this thoroughness. Asked to give a talk on a subject of his choice one time, in Preston, the people were expecting something on South Africa. But his subject was 'Old Preston' and he astonished his audience with his intimate knowledge of the old city. When asked where he found his information he simply replied, 'by looking about and asking old people questions.'

He died at the age of 85, not a bad age for someone with a heart condition.