

30 January

Fr WILLIAM DONOVAN 10 June 1900 – 30 January 1984



When the Franciscan friars were allocated the south and southeast of the Archdiocese in 1958, they often heard the name of Fr Bill Donovan in the remotest places. He was based in Enkeldoorn (Chivhu) for twenty years but was continually on the road moving to each of his twenty-three out-schools in turn. Everywhere his emphasis was on the fundamentals: basic (primary) education and the catechism. He lived for the people.

He was one of three priests in his North London family of Irish origin and he went to school at St Ignatius, Stamford Hill. He spent 40 years in Rhodesia and his mother complained he only came home once. He entered the Society in 1919, was ordained in 1932 and left for Africa in 1934.

At first, he was at St George's, 'the hardest time of my life', but after three and a half years he went to St Benedict's to learn Shona and moved on from there to Triashill and Driefontein which was his official base for his roaming work, referred to above, with its unofficial base at Chivhu. He focused on the schools and built a series of huts for himself at strategic points. He tolerated the government 'interference' as they provided the teachers' salaries but he wrote 'blistering letters' complaining about their behaviour.

In 1959 he was in Mangula (Manghura), as chaplain to the sisters and pastor for the mine workers. Later he was five years at Braeside as parish priest and held the same position at Mabelreign. At the age of 70, he moved to Martindale as chaplain and pastor for the surrounding commercial (white) farms. When Gerry McEnhill took over from him, he wrote, 'I was 25 years younger than him but struggled to do what he did.' Bill had cards for every family and on the back instructions how to get there.

Despite living 'in the bush' for so long he was always immaculately dressed. 'His manner was imperious ... his instructions peremptory. He was a great conversationalist but not a good community man. He was not tolerant of the opinions of others and, though he had enemies, he had many friends.' John Gough, a diocesan priest, remembered the name *Chomokore* being applied to him with its connotation of dark clouds gathering. There is a correspondence in the archives where Edward Hancko accuses him of snubbing the new bishop (Chakaipa) on a visit. Bill exploded and replied to his 'fevered letter' saying Hancko was 'inclined to lie.' He wrote a three-page letter of explanation to the bishop.

At 75, he returned to England and took over from Bernard Bassett on the Scilly isles. He died at Colyn Bay nursing home when he later moved to St Beuno's, Wales.