

2 February

Br ALFRED ALLEN

18 November 1850 – 2 February 1885

Alfred Allen was one of the ten who died in the first years of the Zambezi Mission and, as he was only 34, he contributed to their average age being only 40. He was born near Cambridge at Haddenham and, on arrival in Africa, went to remote Pandamatenga on the present border between Zimbabwe and Botswana, close to the Victoria Falls.

He wrote several letters that have survived and speaks of his loneliness as there was no one who knew his language. But he did not complain and was happy that, as a brother, there was always much to do while the fathers had nothing to do except try to learn the different languages of the area. Their planned journey to the Lozi was constantly delayed and Allen soon discovered that George Westbeeck, the trader who had welcomed them in the beginning, was actually contriving to block their passage north in favour of François Coillard of the Protestant Paris Missionary Society. The king of the Lozi, who had been initially welcoming, was turned against the Jesuits and so once again, as had constantly happened in these early years, their mission was a failure.

But Allen believed that all their sufferings would one day bear fruit and so he never became discouraged. He wrote, giving us a glimpse of the theology of the time, 'It is a sad thing to see so many people who know nothing of God, living and passing away in this ignorant state with no hope or knowledge of eternity' (Aug 16, 1882). And later, 'I can't forget to make use of these trials and I hope they will help draw down many graces on this unhappy country and its people. This is what I often pray for as well as I can during the long hours of sleepless nights or during the day when I am lying in the wagon' (1 Nov 1882).

One or other of the community was constantly down with fever and when Allen got it yet again, in 1885, he had serious 'convulsions which led to an internal rupture' and a painful death.



On 30 April 1989, Bishop Prieto of Hwange invited the Jesuits to be present at the dedication of a shrine at Pandamatenga 'in honour of the first heralds of the gospel' in the diocese. Here, Gerry McCabe stands by one of the Jesuit graves.