

**Br John Masterson, S.J.**  
**(1878-1959. In Zambia 1912-1915)**

### **3 February 1959**

Br John Masterson was born only five minutes' walk from Lauriston Church, Edinburgh, and was brought up in the parish. He was an upholsterer by trade. When he left Edinburgh for London to join the Society (1900), his father said encouragingly: 'Well, it's better to lose you like this, than to see you die on the scaffold'.

After his noviceship he spent a year at St Beuno's and another at Manchester, before being sent to Malta. The time that he spent there as cook coincided with the last two years that the English Province staffed the Maltese College. In 1907, the Provincial, Fr Richard Sykes, who had previously been Mission Superior, withdrew his men despite protests, as he was short of personnel. Then Br Masterson spent another year at St Beuno's and two at St Ignatius, Preston. He was known as 'Sandy' from then on.

He was then sent to Bulawayo (1912) and after a short time he went north to Chikuni, as cook and poultry farmer. He was much appreciated by Fr Moreau who was happy to have someone to look after the kitchen while he himself managed the farm. When Br Masterson was leaving after three years he wrote: 'Br Masterson, after staying here for three years, during which we much appreciated his good cooking and cheerfulness, has been called to Bulawayo and has been replaced by Br Meier. On hearing of Br Masterson's departure, following that of Fr. Bick last year, an unsophisticated black lady remarked that "all the goods were leaving Chikuni!"' There is a brief reference in one of Fr Moreau's letters of his having started the game of football in Chikuni. He remained in Bulawayo from 1916-21.

He spent ten years on the Mission which might have been many more if he had not suffered an accident while playing football at the age of 42 while on leave in Stonyhurst. Phlebitis followed and the doctors judged his return to Africa to be impossible and after convalescence at Petworth he went in 1923 to St Beuno's.

A Father who knew him well said: 'Until his infirmities prevented him, he was known to be an exceptionally hard worker. He threw himself wholeheartedly into the office entrusted to him. As refectorian at St Beuno's the theologians knew that if anything was wanting it could not be blamed on Br Masterson. He had extraordinary energy equaled by a conviction that everything in his day's work could be for God's sake. Some considered him too serious, for he liked discussing problems which were rather heavy for recreation time. Yet he was always ready for a joke, and, what I remember best, he was ready with excuses for those with whom he was not in sympathy. When cook at Bulawayo his superior was the celebrated Fr Marc Barthelemy whom he could never praise sufficiently as a religious and as a friend, while recognizing that, being human, he was not without his foibles'.

The last 36 years of his life were all of a piece, since he moved with the theologate to Heythrop in 1926 and remained there almost without interruption until his death. In 1945 there was a brief interlude when he was appointed beadle to the novices but he no longer had the strength for that sort of work and his stay at Manresa lasted barely a month. His strength of character was shown very clearly in his last two years. He had made a wonderful recovery from a prostate operation in 1956, which the surgeon had been reluctant to perform because of his age and general weakness. By now, he was permanently bent right forward, but despite this and despite the beard he grew, almost up to his death his face kept its old freshness of color and liveliness. He seemed determined to let age make no difference: there was still a briskness in his walk, and he could be seen gathering himself together for an attack on a staircase, as if to pause on the way up would be a defeat. And all this time he was never without pain from his spine which had been injured by a fall as a boy.

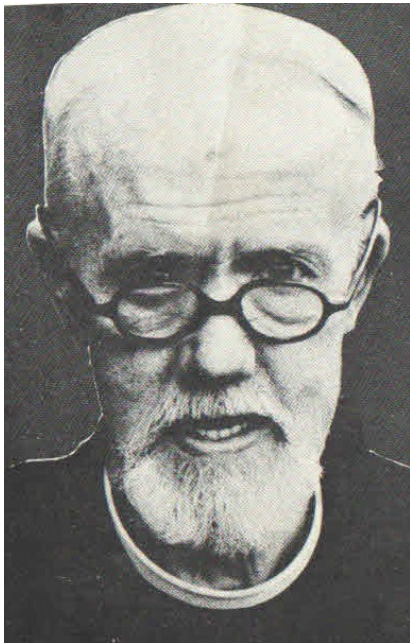
Nor did age lessen his interest in other people. His engaging manner had always attracted friends, and he kept in touch with many of them. While he was in St Joseph's Nursing Home, Boars Hill, in 1956 there was an Anglican canon in the same ward. Br Masterson's affability and freedom from embarrassment enabled him to help the canon on his way into the Catholic Church. After his reception, the former canon visited him at Heythrop to acknowledge the help he had received.

The football injury which prevented his return to Africa did not lessen his interest in the game. He listened with equal interest to broadcasts of rugby and of soccer. His interests in his friends outside the Society was great and lasting but it was more than matched by his interest in the Society itself, especially in the innumerable scholastics he knew at St Beuno's and at Heythrop and above all his own community of Brothers.

3 February

## **Br JOHN MASTERSON**

14 May 1878 - 3 February 1959



An upholsterer by trade, John (Sandy) Masterson was born within five minutes' walk of the Jesuit church in Edinburgh. He was influenced to think of a religious vocation by reading the life of Gerard Majella, a Redemptorist. His father commented, 'better to lose you like this than to see you die on a scaffold.' Evidently, he thought there was some equivalence between the two fates!

Sandy went to Malta as a cook in the last years of the English responsibility for the island and, when he returned to England, he spent three years there before sailing to Southern Africa.

In 1910, he took over from Br Joseph Butwillo, a Latvian, as cook at St George's for ten years in Marc Barthelemy's time, though his stay was broken by two years in Chikuni, N Rhodesia (Zambia) (1913-15).

While in England on leave when he was 42, he was injured in a football game and developed phlebitis (inflammation of a vein) and doctors recommended he stay in the country.

In 1923, he was in St Beuno's as a 'whole hearted' refectorian. In 1926, he joined the new college at Heythrop Park in Oxfordshire where he spent virtually the rest of his life. He was known for his 'engaging manner'.

He had an unusual interest in accidents and murders!

He died at Heythrop in 1959.