

8 February

## Fr THOMAS JACKSON

20 April 1924 – 8 February 2017



Tom was a Yorkshireman, born at Castleford, and was known for his forceful style, characteristic perhaps of the people of his part of the world. He was at the Jesuit school at St Michael's Leeds and was drafted into the army, aged 19. There he learnt vehicle maintenance, something that served him, and others, well both at the old Heythrop and in Africa. It was typical of him that he spent the voyage out in 1960 learning Shona. Years later, while on leave in England, someone found him waiting for a bus – reading his Shona New Testament. He was to spend 57 years on rural missions:

Chishawasha, Seke (from Campion House), Makumbi, Murombedzi, Kutama and Musami.

His character, already hinted at, Fidelis Mukonori tells us, led him into squabbles, almost fights, with teachers and others who did not measure up to his standards. He once told a builder to put something right on the unfinished roof of the church at St Teresa's in Seke and the man refused, saying the ladder was not safe. 'Nonsense', said Tom and he went up himself only to fall and land up in hospital where he could laugh at the incident against himself. His style was also shown by his receiving of Archbishop Chakaipa to Chishawasha for Confirmations. He welcomed him saying, 'You know where everything is. I shan't be joining you. I have a car to fix.' But the Archbishop knew his man and merely smiled and got on without Tom.

He seems to have worried that, in his own words, 'local people had no real knowledge of the faith' and he struggled all his life to put this right. Tom struggled with Vatican II even though he was said to be bright in his studies. He preferred to celebrate Mass the old way – with his back to the people – but was eventually persuaded to turn round.

While in Seke, he lived in a hut at Besa with a bicycle to get around. He wanted to help the people with farming and he gave them fertiliser, working with Br Francis Waddelove, who also came from the north of England but the other side of the Pennine Hills. In Musami, he was joined by Br Joe Mandaza in the pastoral work and one is said to have said to the other, 'he is a fine man but his theology is a little old-fashioned.' But the one who recounted the comment couldn't remember who was speaking of who!

He died at the age of 93 having resisted all attempts to entice him to move to Richartz House though he did spend his last few days there.