

19 February

Br THOMAS CLAYTON 27 July 1897 – 19 February 1975



Tommy Clayton' name still 'hung in the air' in the present writer's first years in Zimbabwe, the late 1960s, though he had returned to the UK with an injured back in 1947. He was born in Langho, near Blackburn, in the NW of England where the Reformation never reached and his was a staunch Catholic family. He was the eldest of ten children, worked as a weaver before being called up in the WWI and then for some years after when demobbed.

He joined the Society in 1921 and three years later he was in Africa: Bulawayo, Empandeni, St Aidan's, Driefontein, Bikita, Triashill and Monte Cassino, working as a builder and a cook. He was always a source of amusement. Andrew McNally tells of a time a group of brothers were in Mozambique on holiday at a remote spot and they were swimming in the sea without costumes. Tommy was floating on his back and a seagull took an interest and swooped to peck him. His companions watching doubled up in laughter and shouted at him to turn over.

A bit slow in the uptake, he was scolded by a superior once for pushing a worker, who was infuriating him, off some scaffolding with a plank. His defence was he'd nothing else to push him off with. As mentioned, he returned to England in 1947 and worked at Rainhill, Stonyhurst, Southwell House in London, Liverpool and Manchester. He felt safe when things went smoothly but got ruffled by change, as when the rules of fasting were made easier. When asked why there was always strawberry jam for tea, he replied it had always been that way. But he adapted to the new liturgy and was heard to wonder how anyone ever went to Mass in the old days.

Michael O'Halloran said he was 'a trenchant commentator on people and events. He lamented that some had the misfortune of being Southerners (born in the south of England) and was inclined to use the word 'Protestant' not as an adjective of description but as an offensive weapon! He took a great interest in fostering vocations among the boys at Stonyhurst though he was a man of few words.

