

May 8

Msgr RICHARD SYKES

11 January 1854 – 8 May 1920



Ask any Zimbabwean Jesuit, ‘Who was Richard Sykes?’ and you will probably get a blank look. Yet he was, according to the record, the second founder – after Depelchin – of the Upper Zambezi Mission. A Lancashire man, born in Whalley, Richard Sykes was educated at the Mount and Stonyhurst. He taught at the latter, becoming rector in 1893, and in 1896 he was made Superior of the Mission. He arrived at the time of the risings when there were, effectively, just two missions in Zimbabwe: at Empandeni and Chishawasha.

He set to work, organising the rapid expansion and crossing the Zambezi in 1902-4 with the opening of Chikuni. It was then, 1904, that he was suddenly recalled to England to become provincial and there he displayed the same energy, opening, for instance, St Michael’s Leeds in 1904.

His time as provincial complete, he was again sent to Africa and again as Mission Superior and, this time, Prefect Apostolic. Again he presided over the expansion and consolidation of the missions but the war loomed and he was frustrated by the sudden drying up of people coming out from Europe. Many of the young priests became chaplains to the soldiers.

He founded – and edited for a while – the *Zambezi Mission Record* in 1898 to inform the wider Church of what was happening in our part of Africa and to promote vocations.

He had a ‘weight problem’ and was rather corpulent and enjoyed squeezing into a coach with the words, ‘Room for a little un’?

He asked to be relieved of his office in 1918 as his health began to decline and he died in Dunbrody two years later.