



Br Jacob Stofner, S.J.
(1865-1936. In Zambia 1914-1936)

24 June 1936

Jacob Stofner was born on 4 February 1865 at Sarentino, Bolzano in the north of Italy, not too far from the Austrian border. He entered the Society in the Austrian-Hungarian Province in October 1894 as a mature novice of 29.

In 1901 he was missioned to the Lower Zambesi Mission and spent all of his time in Boroma, the great mission centre constructed by the energetic Pole Hiller over many years. He was a gifted carpenter and found plenty of scope for his talents at Boroma where they erected magnificent buildings that still stand as a monument to their creative skill and devoted labor, despite years of abandonment and neglect.

He was quite talented artistically and carved a fine statue of St Peter Claver, the patron saint of Mururu Church, which later was carried over the river to Katondwe after the Expulsion. One of the results of Fr Bert's time as Mission Superior was to request Fr Seidel to transfer it to the new centre of the mission at Kasisi, where it still stands today. Although a skilled artisan he was not always appreciated by his superiors, maybe because of his artistic temperament or his different interests.

While mainly based at Boroma he was frequently called on to help in other stations too and there is an account of him accompanying Fr Hiller to visit the remote Lifidzi in the east, near the Malawi border. While at Boroma he got to know Br Longa, a Slovak. They both got on very well with the Poles, Frs Hiller and Hankiewicz and Brs Uhlik and Tomanek. When the Edict of Expulsion came, Br Longa and Fr Moskopp persuaded him to join them and work in the new mission over the Luangwa River which soon was a Polish responsibility.

He crossed over the river with his companions in 1914 and spent the next 22 years in providing the wooden structure in all our houses and churches, beginning at Kakara in Feira (1914), Kapoche (1915) but mostly at Katondwe and even in Kasisi. He was a 'man of parts' and could put his hand to different tasks, as Fr Kielbasa writes: 'he was doing far more than one would expect of him. In the morning he was sacristan, later on in the day, the cook; if someone was sick he became the infirmarian and on Sundays and feast days he played the organ' – all on top of his basic job of carpenter!

Even in his old age, when he was helping Br Kodrzyński in the building of the remarkable seven sided Church with a square tower at Katondwe, he was the one who organized the supply of materials, often getting the wood etc. from over the river. Since he was born in Italy (and I presume held an Italian passport), he was persuaded by Br Kodrzyński to write to the Italian President, Benito Mussolini, for a contribution. In due time a cheque for L45 came which covered the cost of putting up the great square tower.

He had other hobbies too including extracting sugar from sugar cane which he sometimes fermented and added herbs for medicinal purposes. He was much appreciated by the people who really mourned his passing. Mgr Wolnik summed up his character: 'He was simple, helpful, kind and led others by good example. He was very sincere in his dealing with others'.

On 24 June 1936 he passed away very peacefully just like his good friend Br Longa and like him living a long and fruitful life for 71 years.