

17 August

Fr WILLIAM WITHNELL 15 April 1868 – 17 August 1945



William Withnell was a great walker – and talker. He claimed to have waked 100,000 miles in his 40 years in the country. He talked to everyone he met on the way and this helped his Shona. He served in eleven missions; St Aidan's, Umtali (Mutare), Hama, Driefontein,

Chishawasha, Mhondoro, Musami, Bikita, Kutama, Chishawasha and the Seminary. His obituarist wrote enigmatically:

Largely on account of his sympathetic dealings with people of every class and condition and his genial and unassuming ways, he became a personality whom most of his acquaintances were glad to have met, even when the meeting was enlivened by expressions of mutual misunderstanding.

The second in a family of thirteen born in Ormskirk, Lancashire, England, William seems to have set the tone for his younger siblings. Seven of them followed him into religious life or the priesthood. After two years of law studies, he entered the novitiate in 1887 and was ordained in 1901. He started at St Aidan's and came to Southern Rhodesia in 1906 to begin his work in many places. He founded the mission in Bikita and the phot shows him at his first church. When the bishop was coming to visit him, he told him to come with many presents. Chich came with soap, tobacco, sugar, etc and Withnell greeted him, 'Is that all?' He liked sherry and it wasn't among the presents. The bishop told him to buy a few bottles. He bought three dozen.

He worked quietly and earnestly wherever he was. When his health faltered, he retired to Cape Town where he died.