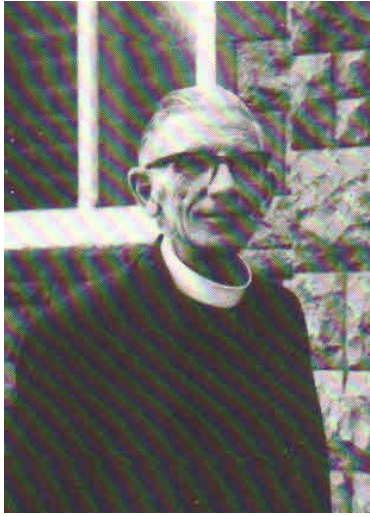


1 September

FR BRIAN RIORDAN 12 October 1907 – 1 September 1985



Brian Riordan spent five years of his 78 years in Africa and they are quickly passed over in his obituary. He was in Mhondoro, Kutama, Makumbe and Martindale in rapid succession. He was born in Belfast and was educated there at St Malachy's College. He spent nine years as a journalist, before joining the Jesuits, as an art, theatre and music critic. He entered in 1934 and was ordained in 1942 and immediately became a chaplain in the war.

After the war he had his five years in Southern Rhodesia before returning to the UK and working from Craighead as a retreat giver. He was 'a great listener' but 'afraid to form advice'. But he encouraged lay people to be active in the Church and society. He gathered copious newspaper cuttings on current events for judicious use as opportunity arose.

In 1964 he began the work that makes his life unusual. He went to the Shetlands, the northernmost islands off the coast of Scotland where he was to stay for 16 years. There were few Catholics to begin with as the Reformation had swept them away. But the Flemish Jesuit had started a 'Mission to the North Pole' in the mid nineteenth century and these islands were part of their area. Shetland with its capital at Lerwick, was part of the parish of the Orkneys, 100 miles to the south, and the priest used to visit for few months a year. But Brian took up permanent residence and witnessed the boom when oil was discovered in the North Sea. Shetland acquired its own local government and the Catholic congregation grew. Brian reached out to other Christians and was a great ecumenist on the islands as well as a counsellor and involved in local affairs, for example, education. He wrote an ecumenical syllabus that included the early Christian sites that all Christians could claim. It was still in use after his death.

He grew fuchsias and roses in his garden and when a ball came in from the children next door, he invited them to play there so that his garden became a playground. Once a month he would go to the RAF station at the northern tip of the island at Muckle Fugga.

Bad health eventually drove him back south and he worked in a parish in Northern Ireland at Ballykillbeg, where again he reached out to the children.