

17 October

## Br JOSEPH HEDLEY

9 May 1846 – 17 October 1933



‘Jack’ Hedley went to sea in 1863. ‘They were real sailors in those days’, he would say later. His father did not approve and his sister prayed that he would give up wandering. His ship was wrecked off Tunisia and Jack was one of the lucky ones that made it back to England. He applied to the novitiate but was sent away to wander some more. He came back the following year, 1873, and this time was accepted. Six years later he was on his way to join the Zambezi Mission as one of the first party of eleven. It was

Jack who carved the three-foot-high cross, high on a tree, once they passed the Limpopo. He was bending the symbolism of empire to the coming of the kingdom.

The following year he and three others set out for Mzila’s (near modern Chipinge) in the SE. They had a terrible time. While still in the country of the Ndebele king, Lobengula, they enjoyed his protection. But after crossing the Sabi River, the going got tough and the people more demanding. One of the party got lost for six weeks and the others, including Jack, abandoned the wagon and continued on foot as they felt they could be attacked any time. Joseph Hedley (Jack) and Fr Augustus Law were weak with malaria when they arrived and the third, Br De Sadeleer, was asked by Mzila to go back for the wagon. While he was away, Law died and Hedley was too weak to bury him. He struggled to keep the rats away from the dead body that night. Next day he succeeded in getting help to bury his companion and Mzila advised him to leave. But he could not walk and had to be carried on a bamboo stretcher for seventy miles until he linked up with De Sadeleer and the fourth member of the party, Fr Wehl, who had since been found. De Sadeleer later wrote. ‘I could hardly restrain my tears so frightful was he (Hedley) to look at.’ He washed him and used medicines from the retrieved wagon. (It had not been touched). He gave him new clothes and gradually he regained his strength. After two of them, De Sadeleer and Wehl, visited Sofala on the coast to get supplies and where Wehl died, the two brothers retraced their steps to Bulawayo, arriving eighteen months after they had set out and having achieved ‘nothing’.

Hedley stayed on in Southern Africa, helping Fr Prestage at one time to found Empanjeni but in 1889, he returned to England where he lived for another 44 years! He was 12 years at St Beuno’s and 23 years at St Mary’s Hall. Fr Weaver wrote of the ‘vision’ that would appear each day in the lower gallery at SMH at 10.00 where the old man moved with ‘quick little steps up the stairs and then out of sight’. He had been down to the kitchen to collect hot water in a blue grey ginger jar for his daily shave. He died in 1933, within the lifetime of some of our companions still with us today (2022).

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**Br. Joseph HEDLEY**

He was born in London, England, on May 9, 1846 and entered the Society of Jesus on February 1, 1893. He was assigned to the Zambezia Mission and was part of the first group of Jesuits who left in 1879 from Grahamstown, for Zambezia. He took his final vows on October 10, 1883. He is listed in the 1888 Catalogue among the Jesuits who lived in residence of Quelimane. He died in St. Beuno's, Wales, on October 17, 1933.

(Cf. Catalogus Defunctorum in renata Societate Iesu ab a. 1814 ad a. 1970)