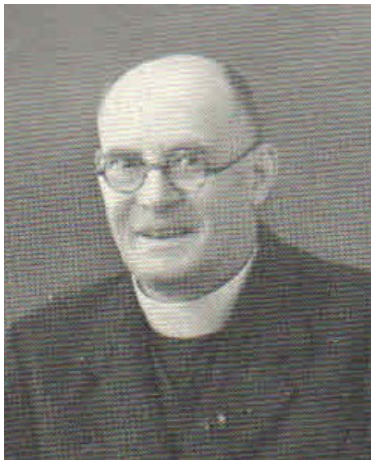


12 November

Fr ALFRED BURBRIDGE 14 March 1870 – 12 November 1946



Alfred Burbridge was born in Huntingdon in England and ‘went into business’ after leaving school at the age of fourteen. At eighteen he began training to become a Methodist minister but had a breakdown from the combination of work, study, preaching and teaching. He became dissatisfied with Wesleyism and moved to High Anglicanism but soon gave that up too and became a Catholic in 1891. Two years later he joined the novitiate. During regency he taught in Cairo and was ordained in 1903 and from 1905 to 1908 he taught at St Aidan’s. He then moved to Chishawasha, Bulawayo, Macheke and Salisbury where he was from 1916 to 1930.

Bishop Chichester tells us Burbridge was born in the same house as Oliver Cromwell in Huntingdonshire and says they both shared ‘an intolerance of opposition’. Cromwell’s ‘Remove that bauble’ (the mace from the House of Commons, thus dissolving Rump Parliament in 1653) was matched by Burbridge – right or wrong - glaring at an opponent and ‘eating him up’. In fact the name given him by an affectionate, admiring Native Education Department was ‘the man-eating tiger.’ He was admired and respected for his knowledge of ‘native’ affairs but he was a hopeless lecturer. ‘He knows more than any of us but he taught us nothing,’ was one verdict. He did however write at least three articles for NADA on ‘native’ affairs. Dr Michael Gelfand thought him the greatest expert on MaShona customs and ritual.

Chick continued, “He was so interested in the local people that he thought no one else was. Years ago I was saying to him we must have local priests. ‘You are saying that to please me. You don’t believe it’, was his response. Taken aback, I said, ‘Well, the pope wants us to try.’ He replied, ‘the pope may believe it but you don’t’. He drove me to St Benedict’s to make his point but he was one of the world’s worst drivers. He believed in both speed and conversation – the latter needing constant glances to see my reaction. We had an accident which needed a message to a local farmer five miles away to come with oxen to pull us out of the hole we were in. When we arrived, Burbridge summoned a young man and, by suggesting answers to his questions, persuaded him he wanted to be a priest.”



Burbridge comes across as passionate in his opinions and devoted in his service. He did a great deal to help his parishioners arranging with reluctant town authorities that residents of the location have married quarters. He supported Elizabeth Musodzi in her work of the women of

the location but he misunderstood Charles Mzingeli, a Catholic, when he started to, mildly, agitate for the improvement of conditions for the local people.

Chick ended his tribute: 'Fr Burbridge was a grand man and a great man; a certain amount of intolerance of disposition, a strange simplicity, some gullibility and a certain eccentricity of character detract neither from his grandeur nor from his greatness.'

The photo shows Fr Burbridge at St Benedict's in about 1930.