

19 November

Fr HENRY WARDALE

5 April 1928 – 19 November 1989



Henry Wardale took over as Superior of the Mission three weeks after the massacre at Musami. He spent the next three years giving constant attention to Jesuits in the rural areas. Should he move them to the safety of town and thus abandon being with the people? Or should he leave them where they were and risk them too being killed. Oscar Wermter, his socius during this harrowing time, later said Henry was constantly reviewing his options. His concern and the tension it generated probably had something to do with the Alzheimer's or dementia he developed after the war.

Henry was born in Wimbledon and educated at the Jesuit college. He joined the Society, aged 18, in 1946 and did his regency at Musami. After ordination in 1960 he returned to Musami where he soon became headmaster. 'Jeep', Fr Anthony Davis, claimed the limelight in the 1960s with his great projects and emphasis on football and Henry was not amused: 'The football at Musami is a standing joke in the mission at large; to me, it is not funny. ... The extravagance lavished on the game and those who play it is wildly out of place considering the circumstances of the school ...'

Henry moved in 1968 to Makumbi where he did much the same work as principal of the school. He was always interested in schools and the students knew he had them at heart. In 1974 he became rector of St George's. Although the college was making some progress in addressing the racial issue, the environment was totally different from a mission school. Henry did his best to become involved. One side-line he promoted was in the college museum and archives. But he had little time to find his feet as, after two years, he became Superior of the Mission and a year later the first provincial of a new province created by Fr Arrupe to bring the Sinoia and Salisbury missions together. As already mentioned, he carried these new responsibilities in the midst of a fierce and bloody war. His support and concern steadied the men in the field and he would risk his own life to visit them.

There were new concerns after the war. Huge numbers of refugees and ex-combatants needed resettlement and the Jesuits were heavily engaged. Henry was particularly involved with auxiliary teachers (CATORUZI) who came from many countries to develop the schools.

But the first signs of Alzheimer's were beginning to show. He had to retire from being provincial and moved back to Makumbi to teach for a while. But the students themselves noticed. At one time he took a class of 80 students without realising it was the wrong class. He was cared for attentively by Mark Hackett, the superior, the CATORUZI teachers and the LCBL sisters but his condition worsened. Eventually he had to go into St Anne's Hospital. He suffered a great deal. It was disorienting and humiliating and he felt it. But those who lived with him and spoke about him realised that deep down he accepted his condition in the spirit of the Exercises.