

12 December

Fr JOHN APEL

11 September 1861 – 12 December 1939



John Apel was, it seems both delightful and irritating! He was ‘annoyingly deliberate but it would take him too long to pass from a gentle to an angry mood’ so he didn’t. James Kendal writes amusingly about him in *Letters and Notices*. He was the son of a Prussian school master who emigrated to Luxembourg. Studying Geography at school, and deliberating about it, no doubt intensely, led him to realise there were parts of the world where the gospel had not yet been announced. So he decided to do something about it. He attended the Apostolic School at Turnhout, Belgium, where the regime was designed to toughen people for the missions. It was so tough, it seems, that it damaged his health. The novitiate, which he entered in 1883, also ‘had a curdling effect on his inner life.’

Weld rescued him and brought him to South Africa and set him to teach at St Aidan’s but ‘his impassive manner and foreign accent reduced his class to a bear garden.’ Indue course he moved to Oña, ‘an ancient and sombre monastery’ in Spain for theology where he met ‘bleak surroundings, strange faces, outlandish customs and formidable piles of books.’ Two years was enough. He was ordained and returned to South Africa, to Keilands where he set about learning the local language. But he was soon sent to Macloutsie to be chaplain to the Dominican sisters who were on their slow (2 years) way to Salisbury. He then returned to Keilands where he remained until 1908 when he went to develop Gokomere and ‘coaxed a living from the refractory soil.’

In 1913 he went to England – Wakefield – to rest and do light work and in 1916 he was back in Africa, this time in Gweru. He went to Chishawasha in 1921 and returned to Gokomere in 1924 in time to stand up to the Predicants’ (DRC) attempted encirclement of the mission. Not only did he prevent this but he expanded the work to Bikita (Silveira) though he ‘had his foot on the brake rather than the accelerator’ (Kendal).

John Apel did some writing of pamphlets and he translated the *Imitation of Christ* into Shona. He also wrote an account of a family who buried their epileptic relative alive in a cave and how he was rescued and the family arraigned before the courts.