

13 December

## Fr FRANCIS GITS

26 September 1888 – 13 December 1949



Born in York he began school at the Bar Convent there, run by the Mary Ward sisters. His brother, Alec, remembers how both their parents introduced them to the poor of the city and brought them to visit them. The faith was strong in the family and showed itself in unexpected ways. Frank was deaf in one ear but refused to have an operation in the other because 'that is how God made me'. Music was also a great part of the home and this served Frank well in later life.

He did his secondary education at the Mount and entered the Society in 1907. Alec tells us Frank's interior life blossomed at the Mount under the influence of the 'incomparable spiritual Father, Colchester'. He was a man of enthusiasms and thought there was no place like the Mount, just as he was to say later there was no place like Rhodesia. He arrived in Chishawasha in 1930 and explored from there sites for new missions, for instance, in the Mount Darwin area. He moved to Musami as superior in 1935 and then to Gokomere in the same capacity a year later and had to return to England in 1940 because of health.

At Musami, he discovered a meteor had landed and it was sent to London for examination. In Gokomere he saw to the building of the granite church and the classrooms and guest house. He was once threatened with an axe by someone with a grudge and 'had to decide whether he wanted to be a martyr or not and decided not.' He gave the man a punch on the chin and then others overpowered him and he was locked up for the night on the mission.

His warmth and enthusiasm extended to the children – and condemned prisoners whom he accompanied to the gallows. He had a 'gift of calling forth the affection of others. For a man of such energy and optimism it was a great suffering to be confined to England and the grind of trying to recover his health. He moved to Preston where he supported the Missions in every way he could, especially in producing the *Missionary Magazine*, the successor of the *Zambezi Mission Record*. He took many photos in Rhodesia and made films of life there.

He could not handle failure, criticism and coldness. He developed headaches, shingles, insomnia and had a stroke. He seems to have suffered greatly towards the end. Trying to help him his brother suggested an interior prayer. Alec said, 'his reply haunted me, "But Alec, there is nothing inside me".' Yet there he was with his beads trying to pray. He died in the infirmary at Heythrop.

