

30 December

## Mgr ROBERT BROWN

13 May 1877 – 30 December 1947



Born in Preston in NW England, Robert Brown entered the Society in 1895 and had an unusual regency; in Manila Observatory. Set up by Fr Faura in the 1880s, the observatory quickly earned a reputation as a forecaster of typhoons and saved many lives and much property. While Brown was there (1902-06) he also did research into insects that attacked crops and had a new genus and eleven species named after him, for example, *Brownius Armatus*.

In 1906 he was back in the UK disembarking at Liverpool at 7.30 one morning and finding himself in the classroom at SFX at 9.00. A year's teaching was followed by theology and ordination in 1910.

He returned to Manila and this time suggested to the rector the Jesuits wear white rather than black soutanes in the heat and the rector agreed. He, the rector, appeared a day or two later in white to the astonishment of the community who followed suit. (John Coventry, while provincial in England, attempted to introduce white soutanes in Rhodesia but did not have the same success. He was known for a short while after as 'Congo John').

In 1915 Brown was in Edinburgh, becoming superior in 1920. Two years later he was appointed Prefect Apostolic of the Zambezi Mission. On arriving in March that year, he went straight to Umtali (Mutare) to open the new church. He then travelled to Cape Town to welcome the new Apostolic Delegate. Only then was he able to set about visiting every mission on the Mission. He was full of appreciation for all the work done but moved from a donkey cart to a Ford and set about providing every mission with a car. He noticed the fashion among the settlers was to be clean shaven and presented each bearded member of the Mission with a safety razor as a gentle hint – a milder approach than Peter the Great of Russia who was not beyond shaving recalcitrant courtiers himself.

Brown also noted the establishment of Southern Rhodesia as a self-governing colony in 1923 and the transference of the government to Salisbury. He followed suit and moved his HQ thither and St George's and the Cathedral were soon built there. Concerned about the health of his men, he insisted drinking water be boiled and removed someone from office who did not comply. His

predecessor had died of the fever when visiting the missions in Northern Rhodesia. Brown felt he too should visit those missions in 1926. He took Br Ashton with him and they covered 1000 miles by rail, 500 by foot, 369 by car and 60 by dug-out. It took two months. The following year the Mission was divided between Broken Hill (Kabwe) and Salisbury.

Brown was also active on the Conference of Catholic Church leaders in Southern Africa and was voted to be their secretary.

By 1930 he asked to resign. The record says because of ill-health but it was probably more exhaustion. In his time they had built 15 new churches together with presbyteries, convents, schools and the Kutama Training College.

He returned to Edinburgh and later built a vibrant community for foreign and local Jesuit students at Southwell House. They even had their own unofficial 'Old Boys' Association'. He was also at Stonyhurst for a time and became rector of Stamford Hill during the war.

He returned to visit Africa in 1946 and was taken ill in Ndola. He was flown to Salisbury, to St Anne's and finally to England where he died in the following year at Heythrop.