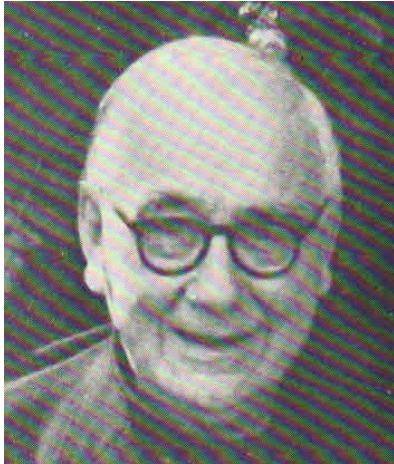


3 December

Fr JEROME O'HEA

28 May 1893 – 3 December 1970



Though he had long left the country, stories of Jerry O'Hea lingered on in oral tradition well into the life time of those of us who are older and still alive today. His achievements alone were great but he added accounts which all who heard them realised were imaginative extensions of what started out as facts.

He was born in Clapham in London and went to Jesuit Wimbledon College for his education. He joined the Society in 1911 and for his regency taught at the Mount, Wimbledon, Beaumont and Stamford Hill. After his ordination in 1925, he came to Rhodesia and started at Triashill where he immediately enjoyed the work. He moved to Kutama in 1931 as superior and it was there that he showed his enormous initiative and enterprise. Everything was an adventure. He learnt Shona and encouraged people to be priests, catechists and teachers. He saw the need for medical care and set about training himself in medicine as well as building a hospital and ordering an ambulance. Fr (later Archbishop) Francis Markall recalled how he arrested TB by using a herb (*Bauchinia Fassoglensis*) which he learnt from a traditional herbalist. And Jerry himself used to do operations (not serious ones) so much so that his reputation grew in the whole district of Kutama.

He was self-taught in medicine, mechanics and building and his example put huge enthusiasm into others, one of whom was the young Robert Mugabe who would later name the new hospital at Kutama after him. But he had a breakdown and had to leave Kutama to recover at the Cape. When he was better, he returned to Europe where he had a second career in the retreat house at Rainhill in Liverpool. Fr Peter Blake was superior and had his own fund of stories about the 'phenomenon that was Jerry O'Hea'. During the 'Mother and Child' controversy, some medical students came to a meeting prepared to ridicule Jerry and the Catholic position. But he got a standing ovation and when there was a particularly difficult question, Jerry deferred to the medics present who were unable to respond. Jerry diffidently put forward his own opinion at some length and astonished all present especially those who had come to scoff.

He also edited the Mission Magazine and raised sums for the missions. Jerry had a cerebral haemorrhage which impaired his activities and left him frustrated. He died quietly and without fuss and was buried at Rainhill.