

GEORGE FORTUNE OBITUARY

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Portrait, possibly from the early 1980s when he worked at the University of South Africa in Pretoria.

George Glynn Fortune, aged 97 years, passed away on the morning of October 17th in his sleep at a residential care facility in Mold, Flintshire, North Wales. He was preceded in death by his wife Denise Helene on August 18, 2012 just short of their 45th wedding anniversary.

Born on July 31, 1915 in **Bulawayo**, Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), George was the eldest son of a Scottish Presbyterian father (a founder of the Garlick & Fortune department store in Cape Town before setting up a new retail store in Bulawayo) and an Irish Catholic mother (she was previously widowed before remarrying). Religion and religious differences were an important influence in his life. He was

admitted as a novice in the **Society of Jesus** (Jesuits) after attending the **Christian Brothers St. Patrick's College** boarding school in **Kimberley**, South Africa, **Heythrop College** (University of London), and **St Beuno's Monastery** in North Wales. Father Fortune was ordained during the 1930s and served as a parish priest in Liverpool's poor communities during World War Two.

He received his Ph.D. in Bantu Languages from the **University of Cape Town** in 1950. Appointed lecturer in the same department, he specialized in **Shona** and other **Southern Bantu languages**, playing a key role in the establishment of African linguistics as a field of study at African universities. In 1962, he became the first chair of the Department of African Languages at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (later the Department of African Languages and Literatures at the **University of Zimbabwe**), a position he retained until 1980. He was instrumental in the racial integration of the university. Over some years, Fortune became less certain of his vocation as a priest and eventually married Denise on August 30, 1967 in a civil ceremony. She worked as his secretary in the Department of African Languages and typed many of his scholarly manuscripts. He was a wonderful stepfather to Denise's children, Julian and Deborah, (who many of his friends and professional acquaintances met as youngsters).

Professor Fortune conducted extensive research and wrote widely on Central and Southern African languages for over fifty years. His writings concerning the Shona language were crucial to the development of a standard Shona orthography, and texts such as *Elements of Shona* remain highly

regarded. Later in his career, Professor Fortune became very much involved in supporting the publication of Shona literature, such as praise poetry, modern poetry, and traditional stories. He made important contributions to the advancement and recognition of vernacular Shona literature, working extensively with writers such as A.C. Hodza and J.C. Kumbirai, who published with the Southern Rhodesia African Literature Bureau.

A funeral service will be held Monday 29th October 2012 at the [Blacon Cemetery](#) in Chester, UK. Tributes are welcome for incorporation within the service, time permitting (contact danrebo@ufl.edu).

The [George Fortune Collection](#) of African language and linguistics materials is housed in the [George A. Smathers Libraries](#) at the [University of Florida](#). A modest [digitized collection](#) from the library's holdings is also available online.