

# Seventy-five years young

View of Milton, looking north, 1978

MILTON is, by about an hour, the second oldest government school in the country; Eveline claims pride of place, having been opened by Sir William Milton's wife, Lady Eveline, before the large official party crossed Selbourne Avenue to what is now Milton Junior School in Borrow Street for Sir William to perform a similar ceremony there.

Although July 25, 1910, is regarded as the beginning of Milton, and it is that anniversary that this supplement celebrates, the school had actually begun a dozen years earlier with the co-educational school opened by the Anglican Church in Bulawayo in January 1898.

It was known as St John's School and the first school-room was the church itself, now the chapel of St. Gabriel's Home. Although numbers grew rapidly from an initial enrolment of seven, the school was always short of adequate space and facilities and, by the beginning of 1909, it was also heavily in debt.

## RESOLUTION

In March of that year R. A. Fletcher (father of Sir Patrick) moved in the Assembly that: "Government look into the possibility of establishing a non-denominational elementary school in Bulawayo immediately." The resolution was approved and Sir William Milton, the British South Africa Company's administrator, gave it his full backing with the result that the company gave permission for separate boys' and girls' schools to be built in Bulawayo, and the government offered to pay off St. John's debts in return for its closure and the transfer of its two hundred pupils to the new schools.

Thus it was that what was to have been known as the Boys' High School opened its doors with 80 pupils and a staff of four in July 1910; the decision to name the new schools after Sir William and Lady Milton originated in Bulawayo and was only announced on the day of the opening.

Under the founder headmaster, Ernest de Beer, the school rapidly acquired an excellent reputation and grew in numbers to such an extent that, within fifteen years, the numbers had topped four hundred and the

school was no longer large enough: As many new classrooms as the site could accommodate had been built already and so the decision was taken to establish a new Upper School on the outskirts of town, on the corner of Selbourne Avenue and Townsend Road. The foundation was laid with all due ceremony on August 5, 1926, by the Earl of Athlone, King George V's brother-in-law, and the move finally took place a little over a year later, building operations having been somewhat hampered by an exceptionally wet rainy season.

## LAVISH

The new school must have looked little incongruous: It had been lavishly endowed — the original estimated cost was £54 853, but that was before a large Beit Memorial Hall was added to the plans — and comprised, beside the hall, 13 classrooms, woodwork shop, offices, dining hall and two hostels; the two halls in particular were built on a large scale and the hostels too were imposing — but in those days the area was largely bush and someone wrote at the time that "beyond Milton is miles and miles of —" whilst the Secretary for Education was rumoured to know of the school merely by hearsay.

Certainly small game could be found (and on occasion shot) in the bush to the south of Pioneer House and, with little effective drainage there were times when the water in the undeveloped road was knee-deep. A canoe was kept to ferry hungry boarders from the hostels to the dining hall and, on at least one occasion, a curdy senior was pressed into service as a suitable mount for the legendary "Patt" Jackson.

During the 1930s Milton grew in many ways: New buildings appeared, most notably the large gymnasium and more classrooms; tennis courts came into use in the last term of 1929 and Milton tennis rapidly gained respect, culminating in 1938 when the Mim du Toit trophy was retained and both Rhodesian championships were won (Graham Cohen is helping to keep the tradition alive in 1985!); clubs of all sorts arose — debating and science, wireless and model aeroplane, and a branch of

the Navy League was formed; and, as always, the numbers went on rising.

The outbreak of war in 1939 hampered the school's development in many ways and, by the end of it, more than 900 OMs were serving with the forces and 113 had given their lives. Once peace had been restored, Milton's growth continued, reflecting the post-war expansion of the whole country and in 1950-51 numbers increased from 450 to over 600, far outstripping the available space and precipitating a "housing crisis": marquees were erected as temporary classrooms, an OM builder, Les Playford (the first boy to enrol back in 1910) put up two new classrooms in twelve days (they're still in use) and Speech Night was compelled to adjourn to the Large City Hall. The boom that followed the establishment of the federation pushed the numbers ever upwards — from 644 in 1954 to 910 in 1959, making Milton the largest school in the federation.

## JUBILEE

The following year witnessed the Golden Jubilee and it was marked, among other ways, by an immense building programme: The spacious Sixth Form Centre, containing six laboratories, specialist and ordinary classrooms, common rooms and library centred on an ornamental garden with a fountain was completed by 1961; the Beit Hall had already received a massive fly tower and a lighting pox with the most up-to-date equipment available; a new block containing classrooms for a commerce department and staff-room was going up; there was a new administration block; the foundations of an extensive technical department had been laid; and on the drawing board were the plans for a classroom block which would be an audio-visual centre with eight rooms connected by closed circuit television. Unfortunately, although the plans had been approved and the money voted for this last project, the end of the federation meant that it was never implemented, but the rest was pretty impressive and made Milton not merely the largest (1 180 pupils and



E B de Beer, headmaster 1910-1925.

70 staff) but also by far the best-equipped school in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland.

The year after 1963 witnessed a steady retreat from such grandeur; for the first time in its history, Milton actually faced a declining enrolment and the years leading to the Diamond Jubilee were a period of consolidation with a particular concentration on what is, after all, a school's primary purpose: Academic excellence.

The seventies, too, were a period of retrenchment in some respects, although they were not lacking in achievement, academic, sporting and cultural: Milton, for example, dominated the Lions' Public Speaking Competition, winning five times in nine years, and never more memorably than when Anthony Hall said: "You are as old as your doubts, as young as your faith; as old as your fears, as young as your self-confidence; you are as old as your despair, but as enduringly young as your hope."

## FINE RUN

There was a fine run of plays ranging from the bleak seriousness of *The Strong Are Lonely* to the pure and delicious farce of *The Happiest Days Of Your Life*; a school newspaper that lasted the whole decade began on 16 July, 1971; the Milton Address was introduced on the school's 62nd birthday and rapidly became one of the great events in the year; an impressive array of sports was offered and most of them

pursued with much success; and academic standards remained high — six Murray McDougall and three Rhodes scholarships is a fair record for one decade — and 1975 alone, for example, produced seven major Government scholarships.

As the seventies drew to their troubled close, Milton faced one of the greatest changes in its history — the introduction of universal education for which there had been precious little preparation or time to prepare. In fact, it was a change that passed almost unnoticed and what at the time seemed surprising is perhaps easily explained in retrospect: Irrespective of race, colour or creed, members of Milton have gladly accepted what a great school has to offer and have taken a conscious pride in its long traditions and proud heritage.

## EXPANSION

In the past five years the school has faced the most rapid expansion in numbers ever in its history: From a low of not much over 600 in 1979 it has grown to 1 150 — poised, in fact, to attain its highest enrolment in the very near future. In mid-1985, when Zimbabwe has just turned five and Milton is about to turn seventy-five, the school can still with pride claim the title bestowed upon it some 60 years ago at the laying of the foundation stone — "the leading boys' school".

It would be a bold man who would prophesy where Milton will find itself on the occasion of its centenary but at this moment in its history it is possible to claim that the strong traditions of three-quarters of a century have stood the school in excellent stead.

It is proud of its past and confident of its future; it has the faith to stand firm, facing any challenge that the future might hold, secure in the knowledge that its reputation endures and that those who have had — and will have — the privilege of attending Milton High School will, in the years ahead, remember and remain faithful to their proud motto:

"Quit you like men."