

1

St. John's School, 1898–1910

*'The merit belongs to the beginner should his successor do
even better'*

Egyptian Proverb.

AT ABOUT 11 o'clock on the morning of Monday 25 July 1910, a lengthy procession wound its way across Selborne Avenue and some 200 yards down Borrow Street. At its head were some of Southern Rhodesia's most distinguished names including the Administrator, Sir William Milton, and his wife, Lady Eveline, the Director of Education, the Solicitor-General, Sir Charles Coghlan and the Mayor and Town Council; visitors from South Africa included the Administrator of the Orange Free State, Ryk Myburgh. Behind them came a fair proportion of Bulawayo's population including some 300 school children. They had just witnessed the opening of the new girl's school named after Lady Eveline and were on their way to see Sir William do the same at the school which was to bear his name.

The main ceremony and speeches had taken place at Eveline as it was then the larger of the two schools, incorporating both the kindergarten department and Standard 1 for boys and girls — it had been estimated that some two-thirds of the two schools' initial enrolment would attend Eveline and in fact by opening day Eveline had attracted 207 pupils, Milton 81.

The Chronicle recorded the event at great length, relegating even the hunt for Dr. Crippen to an insubstantial item, and uncompromisingly declared:

“Yesterday was not only an important day in the history of Bulawayo, but, as His Honour the Administrator properly said, it marked perhaps the most important event in the history of the town and of Southern Rhodesia generally. For the first time in the history of the country, an important centre has been fully

equipped by the Government with educational facilities from the kindergarten department to the matriculation stage.”

The report continued:

“The Mayor extended a hearty welcome to Sir William and Lady Milton. The opening of the two new schools, he said, was an important step in Rhodesian education, and it was extremely good of the Government to assist so much in the building of the two schools. As a memento of the schools that would in future be called by their names, Councillor Basch (the Mayor) presented His Honour and Lady Milton with silver keys to the schools.”¹

In fact, as the Chronicle’s account makes plain, the names given to the schools resulted from suggestions made by Bulawayo; initially the government had intended that the names should be — as subsequently they were in Salisbury — ‘The Boys’ High School’ and ‘The Girls’ High School’, but the Mayor and Council wished otherwise, not, as the Mayor “hastened to assure Sir William and Lady Milton that it was in (any) spirit of empty flattery that they desired that their schools should be named the one the ‘Milton’ and the other the ‘Eveline’ High School, but it was due to a true appreciation of the public-spirited attitude displayed by His Honour in connection with this matter. (Applause.)”

In his reply, Sir William stressed how honoured he felt to be officiating at the ceremony and went on to emphasise the importance that his Government attached to education. Various other speeches followed: “Mr. Gordon Forbes referred to the generous donations of the Beit Trustees in the form of boarding grants, scholarships and other donations. Mr. Duthie, the Director of Education, proposed a vote of thanks to the Loyal Women’s Guild, who had presented each of the schools with a Union Jack. When the ceremony was over, the doors were formally unlocked and the flag hoisted.”

The whole party then moved to Milton and the flag-raising and unlocking ceremonies were duly repeated, upon which the proceedings came to an end; the pupils were no doubt delighted that work did not begin until the following day.

Although Milton acknowledges that date as its beginning, in some respects its origins lie a dozen years earlier. The history of modern Bulawayo began, of course, on 4 November 1893 when the Chartered Company’s forces occupied Lobengula’s capital. Like all of Rhodesia’s early towns, it was at first a very ramshackle and make-shift settlement, “a town of dust and sky, of tin-roofed shacks, of men and oppor-

tunities". Within two years, however, Bulawayo (and Matabeleland for that matter) had its first school when the Dominican sisters opened their doors to ten pupils on Monday 28 October 1895. Less than three months later, on Monday 13 January 1896, the Jesuits established what later became known as St. George's College but was initially St. George's Public School with an enrolment of just six. The Anglicans lagged behind despite the fact that the first Bishop of Mashonaland, the Right Reverend G.W.H. Knight Bruce, had accompanied the column that occupied Bulawayo and had conducted the first christian services there; indeed, there is some evidence that he planned a church and a school for the town but he suffered severely from malaria and left the country in January 1894 to die only a little over two years later.

Before his departure, Knight Bruce had appointed as Vicar General the Venerable J. Hay Upcher, a breezy Norfolk man, "acceptable everywhere and to everyone", who had built the first brick church in Salisbury and now set out to do the same in Bulawayo. By the end of 1894 work was under way on a stand in Abercorn Street and the new church was dedicated in the name of St. John Baptist on 10 March 1895.² The work of equipping the new church proceeded slowly throughout the rest of the year and in 1896 the Matabele Rebellion brought development and progress at St. John's to a standstill, as in the rest of Bulawayo.

In the wake of the rebellion, the first priest-in-charge of Bulawayo, the Revd. E.A. Hammick, left and the new Bishop, the Rt. Revd. W.T. Gaul (Archdeacon of Kimberley throughout the years of the diamond rush), acted as priest-in-charge. Gaul seems to have been a man of great energy (Robin Ewbank writes of him 'perambulating the aisles while preaching') and threw himself into a programme of extensions and improvements at St. John's, particularly the provision of a nave, one of whose functions would be to serve as a schoolroom during the week. He first suggested a church school some time during the middle of 1897, the diocese to pay the teacher's salary (£200 p.a.) and the parish to provide a house. Within months the Revd. Nelson Fogarty, "the itinerating priest" attached to the Railway Mission began the first Anglican school in Bulawayo in a small house near the church in Fife Street.³ Meanwhile work on the nave continued: it was sixty feet long, built of iron sheeting and completed in time for the arrival of the railway in Bulawayo on 4 November 1897 when it was crowded with distinguished visitors although there was as yet no floor and the seating consisted of deal planks.

The Chronicle of 14 January 1898 carried an advertisement which began:

“Church of England Grammar School.

Commercial and Classical Education.

Preparation for University School Examinations”

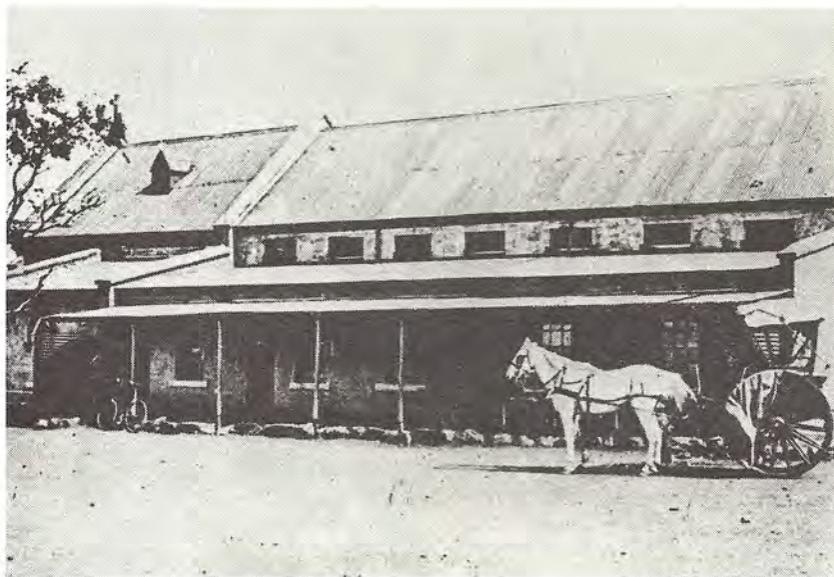
and four days later, on Monday 17 January 1898 the new school officially opened, albeit “with no desks or apparatus, with four boys and three girls”. The termly fees were: Kindergarten £1-10; Standards 1 & 2 £2-00; Standards 3 & 4 £2-10; Standards 5 & 6 £3-00; and the hours of work were 9.00–12.30 and 1.30–3.00. The headmaster and only teacher was Mr. V. Teychenné of Kimberley whilst his wife ran the kindergarten; one suspects that Bishop Gaul had lured his man from his old archdeaconry. At any rate, as Robin Ewbank has remarked in his “The Forerunners”, “he must have been a man of parts, for he undertook to teach Recitation, Composition, Grammar, Geography, History (English and Cape), Latin, French, Mathematics, Science, Drawing, Singing, Musical Drill, with Greek, piano and typing as extras, to pupils from six to sixteen, and to prepare them for the Cape University Entrance Examination”.

Although the initial enrolment was only seven — St. George’s at the same period had, by comparison, nearly a hundred pupils — numbers evidently picked up throughout the year; by September they were between sixty and seventy and, on 23 December, after the first prize-giving, the school put on an elaborate concert and “Kinderspiel”, attended by the Administrator, Captain Lawley, who invited all the pupils to a party at Government House on Christmas Eve. Two years later the school had reached a hundred pupils ranging in age from six to sixteen and the end-of-year prizes were distributed by no less a person than Mr. Rhodes himself and after the ceremony the pupils produced a comic opera, “King Bulbous”; regrettably, no record of CJR’s opinion of it has survived.⁴

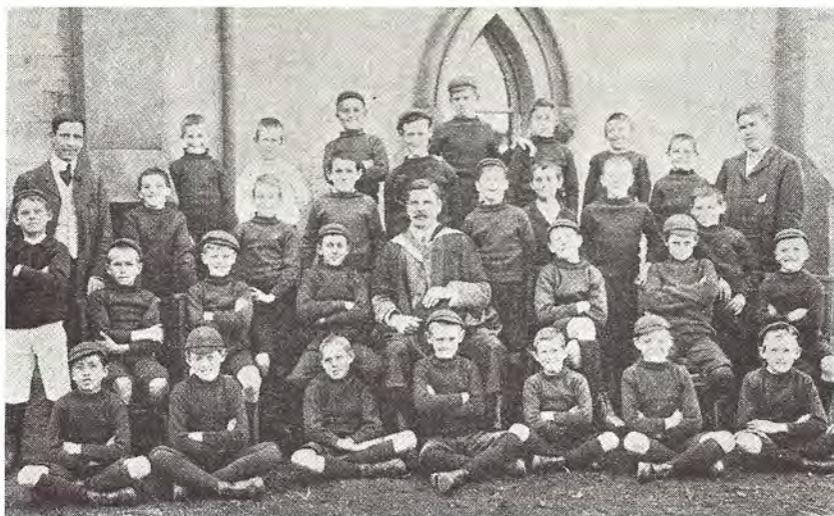
The school was now subject to government inspection and received a grant on “the £1 for £1 principle”; its hours for seniors had been extended and their day only ended at 4.00; and by 1902 it had 120 pupils and three “English trained and certificated” teachers, although, by its own admission, the Catholic church was still supplying the major part of education in Bulawayo. The school had provided boarding facilities for the boys from the beginning (in the best English public school tradition, they lived with the Headmaster) but up to that time there was no provision for girls. However, in September 1900 Bulawayo had received



The nave of St. John's Church which doubled as the schoolroom, c.1900. The decorations seem to have been changed with the church's seasons: on the left is evidently Eastertide, on the right the Harvest Festival.



St. John's Church, c.1899.



St. John's School, 1906. The Headmaster, E.C. Dodrell, is seated centre.

its new rector, the Revd. J.S. Wimbush who had moved into the new rectory, a converted ganger's bungalow of the sort that can be moved from place to place along the line of rail and which Bishop Gaul had bought from the Railway for £600 in 1898. Wimbush and his wife fell ill and their doctor pronounced the rectory unfit for human habitation, a fact which did not prevent the Council from now leasing it to the school for £6 per month as a girls' hostel. Under Miss Goatley, St. Margaret's, as it became known, opened with nine girls in September 1902 and survived with extensions for many years, becoming the first Eveline hostel in 1910.

In 1904 Canon John Hallward arrived at St. John's in succession to the unfortunate Wimbush; described as "a giant of a man wearing the largest hat and the biggest boots I have ever seen", he was devoted to church schools and built two new classrooms out of iron sheeting which together occupied some 70 feet by 14 feet. Nevertheless, conditions in the school still verged on the primitive: the kindergarten was taken in a small vestry, the girls in the church nave where the school had started and the boys in two groups in the new "tin classrooms". The Revd. G.E. Broderick, who arrived to teach at the school in 1906, wrote: "My (class)room is 36 feet long and 13 feet wide and 27 feet high: imagine that with twenty boys at the close of a morning with an African sun pouring down on a tin roof." To make matters worse, a Mr. Painting acquired the neighbouring stand and set up business as a tinsmith there, although he did abate the nuisance after vigorous protests from the Church Council.

By this time the Teychennés had left and Mr. E.C. Dodrell had become Headmaster with a Mrs. Houlden in charge of the girls. Although numbers had now reached 170 the shadows were beginning to close round the school. An even more disillusioned Broderick commented that, although nominally St. John's was equivalent to a secondary school in England, in practice it was only equivalent to an elementary school, as boys left the school early, either to find work or to go to St. George's. Not only had St. George's always outclassed its Anglican rival in that it had a better and larger teaching staff, proper classrooms and some playing fields, but St. John's was becoming financially insecure — by the beginning of 1910 it was £850 in debt. However, it was the government that was to seal the school's fate.

As far back as the late 1890s there had been agitation about the injustice suffered by parents who did not wish their children to be

educated in denominational schools. In 1899 Sir William Milton had encouraged the B.S.A. Company's Board to pass a resolution declaring that grants for European education should be paid to undenominational schools only. The resolution was strongly opposed and the formidable support of Cecil Rhodes enlisted with the result that the Board rejected what became known as the Milton Resolution; and when the Legislative Council of Southern Rhodesia turned its attention to the task of making permanent regulations for education, it passed an Education Ordinance giving full recognition to the principle of government aid to voluntary schools irrespective of denominational inclination. A concession was made with regard to specifically denominational teaching by the adoption of Rhodes' suggestion that "from say half past eight to nine every morning a separate classroom should be allotted to the Clergy of the different denominations who desire to instruct children . . . in their religion".⁵

Thus the situation was resolved: "right of entry" became a feature of Rhodesian Schools that survived until the end of the 1970s and denominational consciences were salved for a time; but it was basically an unsatisfactory solution. The partnership between government and denominations allowed the Education Department no effective means of influencing the policy of any individual school and this was particularly serious so far as secondary education was concerned — according to the Director of Education's figures to the Education Committee in 1907, only 35 pupils — some four per cent of the whole — were enrolled in classes above Standard VI, and only one school in the entire colony was operating a full secondary course to the level of the matriculation examination of Cape Town University. According to the census returns of 1907, 622 children were being educated in aided schools, 205 in private schools, 435 by tutors in their own homes and 392 were out of contact with education of any kind. On the assumption that about half of those taught at home were not undergoing a satisfactory course of instruction, the Director gave his opinion that something over one-third of the child population was unschooled. So it was that the government began to feel that there was a case for the reorganisation of education in the colony and, spurred on by a series of strongly worded resolutions from the Methodist Synod of Southern Rhodesia (as in England, the Methodists proved themselves the most implacable foes of any form of sectarian education — unless it was their own), appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Hugh Marshall Hole to examine the question.

The Hole Committee's report firmly upheld the principle that "government aid should be confined to undenominational schools" and thus cleared the way for greater efficiency and government control, especially as it also expressed the belief that "no town or district is believed to justify the existence of more than one complete primary school (and therefore) one such undenominational school should be supported in each centre". Although there was considerable reluctance to reach equally firm conclusions with regard to secondary education, the need for government-aided secondary schools was clearly recognised.

One other factor coincidentally entered the reckoning: Alfred Beit had died in 1906 and by his will had left £200,000 to be distributed within two years of his death "for educational, public and other charitable purposes in Rhodesia. . ." The capital was invested and, of the interest, £2,000 was made available to supplement grants made by the government to enable country children to attend boarding schools and to provide nineteen scholarships for children who had reached Standard VII and promised to benefit from remaining at school until matriculation level.

The result was a serious proposal not merely to curtail but to cut out altogether denominational schooling by withholding the very necessary pound for pound capitation grant. At St. John's Canon Hallward fought gamely, as did the equally redoubtable Father Marc Bartélémy of St. George's. St. John's now had over 200 pupils and the best staff in its short history; Hallward launched an appeal for £3,000 to pay off the debts and to erect new buildings but it failed and by early 1910 he knew he was beaten and resigned, subsequently to become Headmaster of St. Augustine's, Penhalonga. Meanwhile, Father Bart, as he was known to all, had appealed to the government's pocket, pointing out in a letter to the Legislative Assembly that it cost £15 8s a year, exclusive of boarding fees, to maintain a pupil at a government school as opposed to £5 5s at a school controlled by a religious body. The recommendation to remove the grant was not adopted and St. George's, among others, is living proof of the survival of denominational education; but St. John's days were numbered. Unlike the two R.C. schools in Bulawayo, its staff was anything but stable and, with the failure of Hallward's appeal, there was no prospect of improving facilities whilst the debt grew ever larger. The prime figure behind the closure of St. John's and its replacement by government schools was R.A. Fletcher, the member of the Legislative Assembly for the Western District (and father of Sir Patrick Fletcher). In

March 1909 he 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 when the London Board of the B.S.A. Company gave Milton permission to build separate boys' and girls' schools in Bulawayo, the fate of St. John's was sealed. The government offered to pay off the school's outstanding debt of £850 in return for its closure, but Hallward's successor, the Venerable H.H. Foster, still refused to face the inevitable; by April 1910 the entire staff had given notice and — not surprisingly — pupils were being withdrawn. Foster made a desperate but fruitless appeal to the Sisters of the Community of the Resurrection of Our Lord in Grahamstown to take over the school but finally was compelled to capitulate: St. John's School closed its doors in June 1910 after a life of twelve years and two terms.⁶ The government assumed responsibility for the debt and the entire enrolment of St. John's was transferred to the new government schools.^{7,8} Milton and Eveline thus became the first state-maintained high schools in Rhodesia.⁹

Notes

¹ Sir William's key now occupies a place of honour in the School Museum, having been returned to Milton by his son on the occasion of the school's silver jubilee in 1935. It was his wish that "this key should find a safe resting place in the School which so proudly bears my father's name — as a symbol to remind successive generations of Miltonians, for all time, of the opening of the door in Matabeleland of a great state system of education to Rhodesian boys."

² It became St. Gabriel's Home when the new St. John's was built in Rhodes Street.

³ It subsequently became a Chinese laundry.

⁴ It was not to be Rhodes' last connection with the school. At the beginning of 1902 he promised a hamper of luxuries to St. John's — whisky, chocolates, the sort of things whose supply the Boer War had no doubt made difficult and whose shortage seems to be a recurrent factor in the country's history. Unfortunately death intervened on the 26th March although for some time it was hoped that the hamper had already been despatched. Thereafter, despite the doughtiest attempts by the school authorities, they were unable to extract the promised gift from Rhodes' executors.

⁵ In a memo to the London Board of the B.S.A. Company dated 15 April 1899, Rhodes betrayed his anxiety that those "whose parents do not wish them to receive religious instruction should be taught, otherwise they will get into the habit of saying 'Thank goodness my old dad is an atheist and I can get an extra half hour in the playground!'"

⁶ A year later, however, Foster succeeded in persuading the Sisters C.R. to begin work in Bulawayo and on 1 August 1911 they opened St. Peter's School for girls.

⁷Speaking at a banquet of Old Miltonians and the Eveline Old Girls in 1953, Sir Patrick Fletcher remarked that his father always felt that Milton should in fact have been called St. John's; and he went on to say: "It would have been a happy thought to have continued the name of St. John's for I consider that the establishment of a school for children in Bulawayo in 1897 might justifiably be taken as the real date of the foundation of the Milton and Eveline schools".⁸

⁸Milton's connection with St. John's is perpetuated in the new church in Rhodes Street where the central light of a stained glass window in the east (ecclesiastical south) transept in memory of an old boy, Alfred Perry, depicts the school's crest and motto.

⁹It is pleasing to be able to record that for once "bambazonke" could not be applied to Salisbury. In his "Teaching Rhodesians", N.D. Atkinson notes that "high schools for boys and girls at Salisbury, on a rather less ambitious scale, were completed towards the end of the same year". . .

Odds and Ends, 1898-1910

February 1898: A further teacher for St. John's School, Mr. Green, arrived from England.

April 1899: Shortly before his departure for England, the priest-in-charge, the Revd. Anthony Bathe, held a service for men only to "warn them against temptations which cannot conveniently be discussed in the presence of women and children". Presumably Messrs. Teychenné and Green were in attendance!

August 1899: A ceiling of wooden slats was to be put into the church: first the church roof could not support a ceiling; then the carpenters went on strike.

September 1900: The Revd. J.S. and Mrs. Wimbush moved into St. John's Rectory.

January 1901: The enrolment at St. John's reached a hundred.

1 December 1902: Plumtree School opened with nine pupils on the roll.

1903: There were protests to the Town Council about the injustices suffered by parents who did not wish their children to be educated in sectarian schools.

October 1904: Canon John Hallward arrived at St. John's in the wake of a smallpox epidemic. He was violently opposed to raffles and, on one occasion, stood "upon a chair in a crowded bazaar to protest against a raffle which had been organised unbeknown to him; he was absolutely without fear of anybody".

September 1905: Mr. Painting opened his business as a tinsmith on the stand next to St. John's.

- January 1906: The Revd. A.S. Robins arrived to teach at St. John's; he was also in charge of St. Cyril's, a church for Coloureds near the railway station.
- 21 May 1907: St. John's School travelled to Plumtree with a Football XI and a shooting team; they won the soccer 4-0 and the shooting by an undisclosed total. The headmaster of Plumtree, R.W. Hammond, noted that Plumtree would have won the shooting had not the St. John's Drill Instructor insisted "after the 100 yards event had been fired, that only the four best scores (from each team's six members) be counted".
- June 1907: Bishop Gaul resigned the Diocese of Mashonaland as his health was poor and returned to England to recuperate.¹
- 26-27 November 1907: St. John's played Plumtree at cricket: Plumtree scored 40 and 167, St. John's 180 and 28 for 3, thus winning by seven wickets. Their captain, Bell, scored 137 not out and 23 not out and the Plumtree Magazine recorded that he should not have been allowed to play in a school match as he openly broke the commandment "Thou shalt not smoke". He subsequently took holy orders.
- 1908: At the Pan-Anglican Congress, the diocesan synod presented a resolution that the greatest needs of the diocese were "itinerating priests" and church schools.
- 11 June 1909: Plumtree beat St. John's 17-0 in Bulawayo in the first ever inter-school rugby match played in Rhodesia.
- 31 August 1909: Plumtree won the return match, 15-0.
- June 1910: St. John's School closed causing much indignation to Plumtree pupils, especially the girls who had been keenly anticipating a hockey match against the St. John's girls.

Notes

¹ Billy Gaul deserves a footnote: because of his slight stature he was known as "the smallest bishop in the world", but what he lacked in inches he more than made up for in courage. He reputedly sparred regularly with Barney Barnato and other Kimberley pugilists and on one occasion in Rhodesia, whilst travelling by coach, he told an offensive and noisy drunk to behave himself. The drunk, with much abuse, told Gaul that it was only his clergyman's attire which was saving him from a thrashing, whereupon the diminutive bishop threw off his clerical coat and collar, saying "There lies the Bishop of Mashonland in the dust, and here is Billy Gaul, the man to give you what you deserve", which he then proceeded to do. Once recovered in England, he returned to South Africa where he died in 1928 aged 84.