

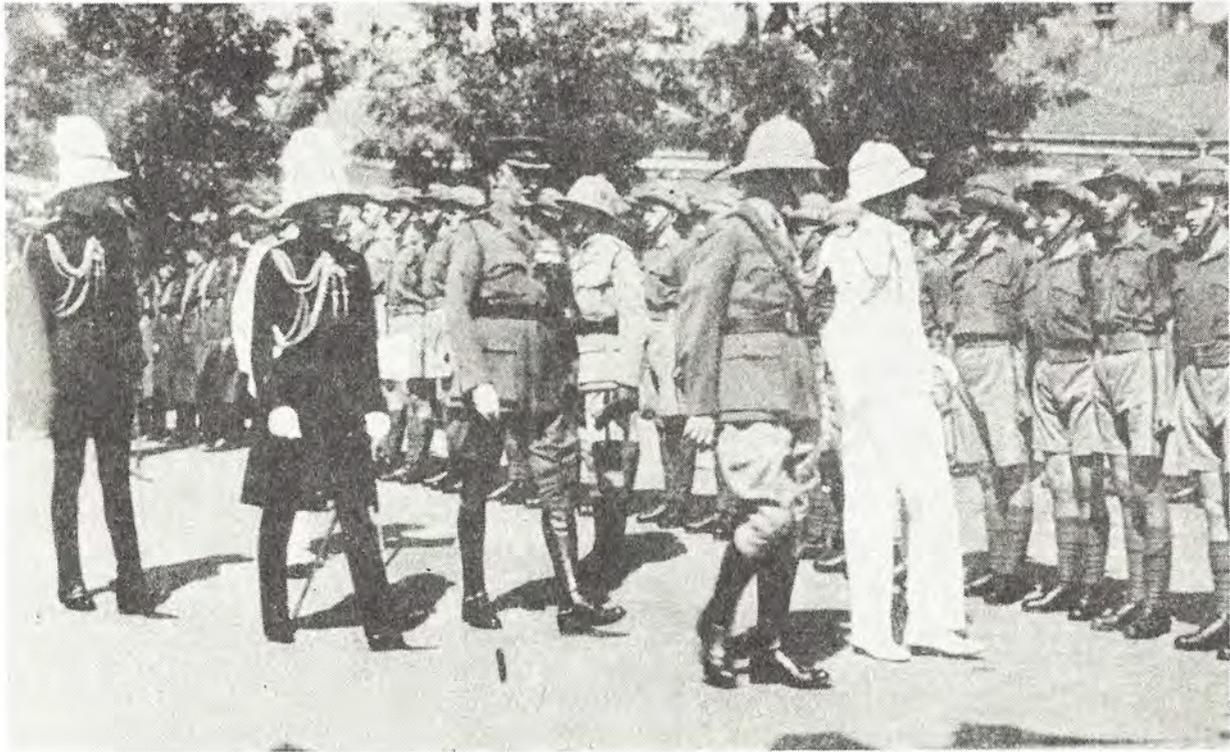
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Livingston and the “Modern Side”, 1930–1939

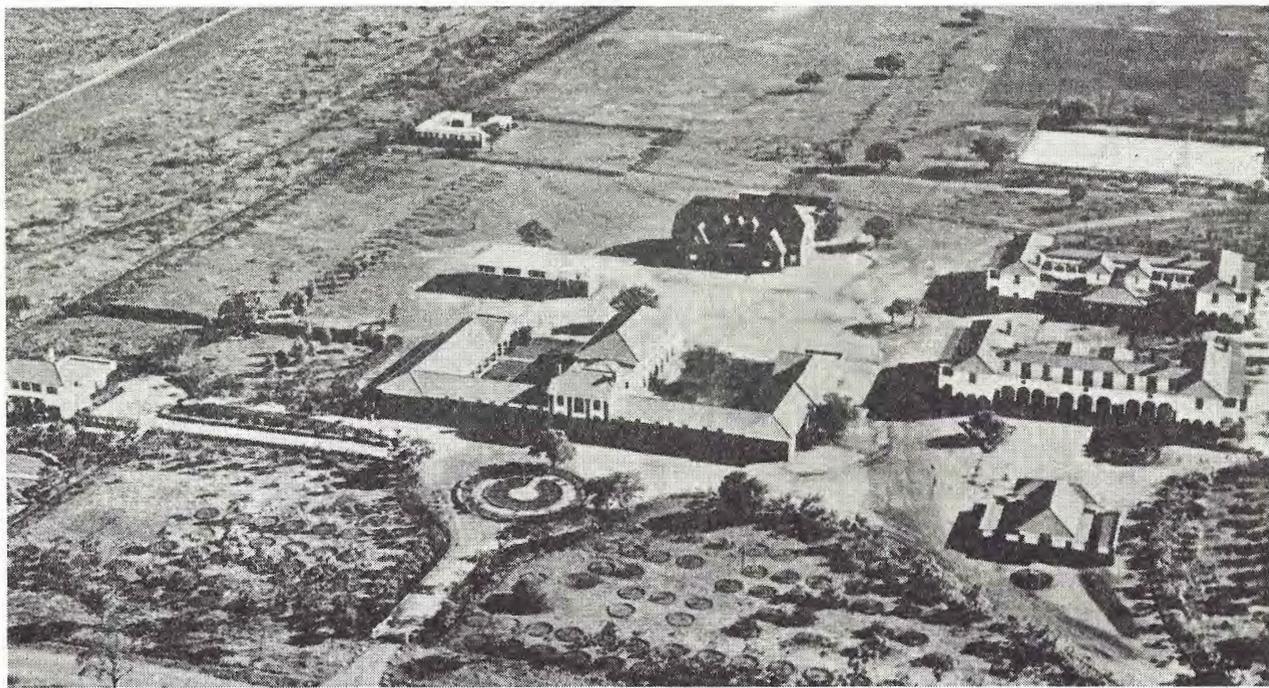
*‘They illuminate our whole country with the bright light of
their teaching’*

Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln.

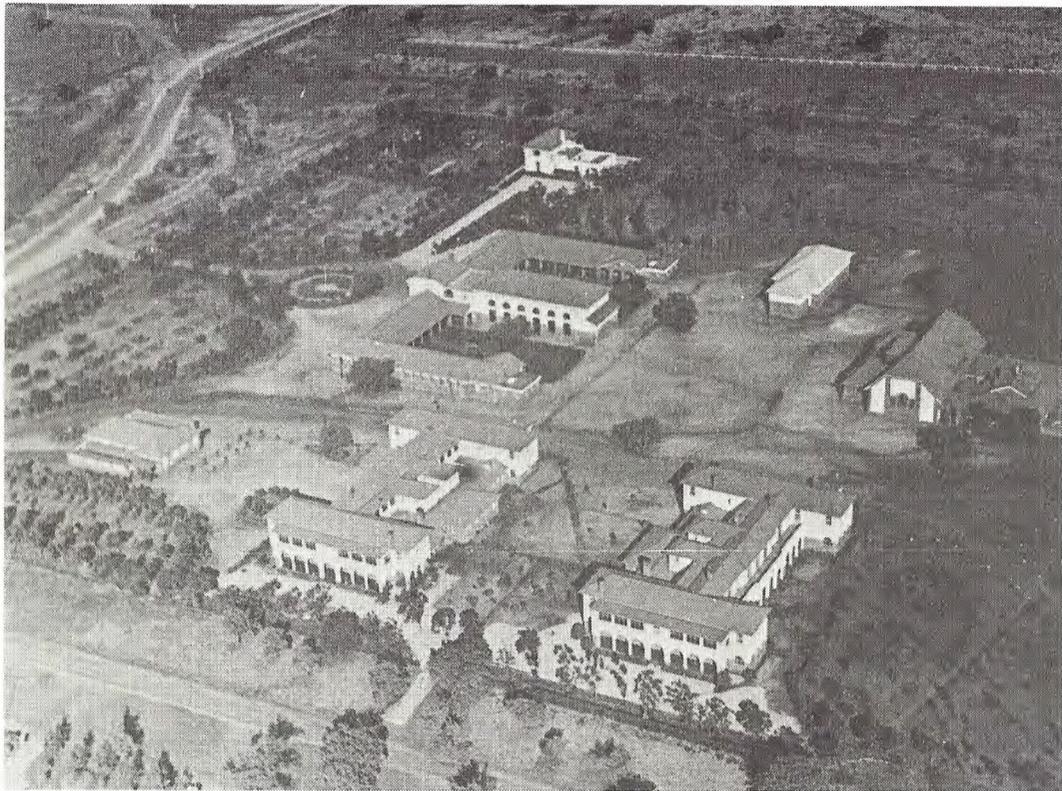
COLONEL BRADY’S successor in 1930 was H.G. Livingston, previously headmaster of Umtali High School and another man with a distinguished record as both soldier — he had ended the war with the Military Cross and the rank of major — and scholar, for he was described as the country’s leading classicist. On his departure eleven-and-a-half years later he recalled that, soon after his arrival at Milton, “he formed the opinion that the School needed a little quiet development”, and in his first years, that was what he gave it. The most visible sign of his presence in the early thirties was perhaps the vast number of trees that were planted — he was a dendrophil and the Miltonian of 1932 noted that “the Headmaster’s enthusiasm for tree planting is at last beginning to show some effect, and in a year or two the School grounds should be very beautiful. Even now the place is assuming a much more pleasant appearance than it had a year or two ago”. And two years later it reported: “Further progress has been made with tree planting, and the front of the School is now a delight to the eye. The Headmaster’s enthusiasm for tree planting is further in evidence from the numerous new holes for trees in various parts of the School grounds”. Many of the literally hundreds of trees that Mr. Livingston had planted have gone to make way for further building, but many more still stand, adding much to the attraction of Milton’s setting. In 1932 the Headmaster’s house in the north-east corner of the grounds was built and Mr. Livingston was able to move in just in time for Christmas after two-and-a-half years in Charter House.



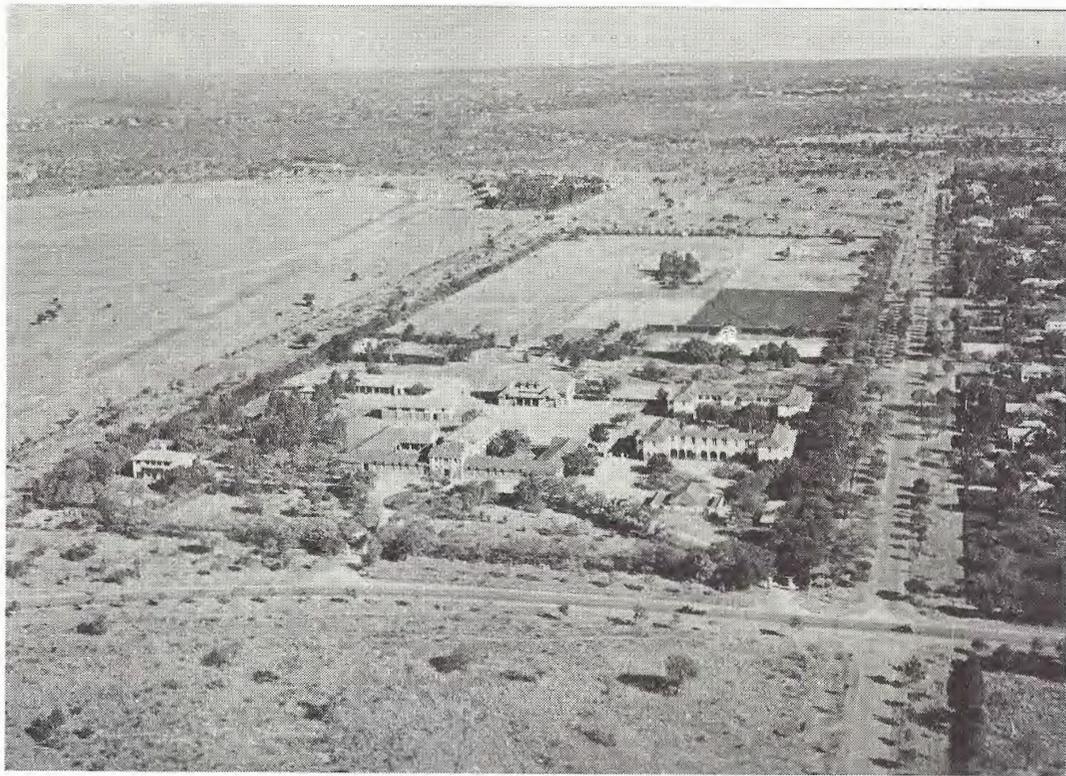
Inspection of the "G" Platoon Cadets by H.R.H. Prince George, 1934.



Aerial View of Milton from Selborne Avenue, c.1936.



Aerial View of Milton from Townsend Road, 1936.



Aerial View of Milton from Selborne Avenue, 1941.

The school celebrated its silver jubilee in 1935; the occasion was marked by a presentation ceremony on 26 July at which the Old Miltonians gave the school a framed photograph of its founder and Sir William Milton's silver key was returned to Milton. Both Mr. de Beer and Colonel Brady were present, the former having travelled up from Cape Town especially for the occasion; sadly Mr. Livingston was on leave and the opportunity of having the three headmasters of Milton present on the same platform was lost. The evening before the Old Miltonians had held a dinner in honour of Mr. de Beer in "the old dining hall at what is now Milton Junior School". Speakers included Sir Patrick Fletcher and Leslie Playford, "the oldest member", and in his reply, "Dab" confessed "his inability to say all that was in his heart"¹. His speech was "greeted with tumultuous applause and, after three rousing cheers for 'Good old Dab' and attempts to raise the roof with 'He's a jolly good fellow', the gathering broke up".

The following night the Old Miltonians joined with the Eveline Old Girls' Association for a "Jubilee Ball under the patronage of His Excellency the Governor, Sir Herbert Stanley"² and two days later Milton and Eveline again joined together in a Commemoration Service addressed by the Revd. Rupert Cranswick³, whilst later in the year, the Prime Minister, Godfrey Huggins, was guest of honour on Speech Night.

The later thirties brought an end to Milton's hopes of "quiet development" bringing instead substantial changes to the organisation and methods of the school in both academic and competitive pursuits. In 1936 the Government had appointed H.F.B. Fox to examine "the efficiency, adequacy and suitability of the present system of education for meeting the needs of those entering the professions, industry, commerce, agriculture and mining"; "whether the present system of examinations can be improved upon"; and "such other matters appertaining to the aforesaid terms of reference as may be useful and expedient". Fox produced a report which strongly urged the necessity of providing facilities "more suitable to the needs and capacity of a very large number of children", something much less academic in both content and approach and less closely geared to the "grievous burden" of passing examinations. To bring this about, he proposed a "tripartite system" made up of academic high schools, technical schools and modern schools, advocating a separation between primary, technical schools and modern schools, the transition from primary to secondary school to take place at twelve with an examination to decide the form of

education for which the pupil was most suited; the upper age limit of compulsory attendance would be raised to sixteen to permit a four-year course of instruction in all schools and Fox envisaged that the proportion selected for academic high schools would be relatively low. The matriculation examination of the South African Joint Board was to be discontinued because of its emphasis on memory rather than reasoning and Fox recommended the introduction of the Cambridge School Certificate instead. The Junior Certificate in its existing form should be abolished.

So far-reaching were Fox's recommendations that the Government studied their implications for more than a year, but finally introduced legislation which implemented most of them although it refused to sanction the type of twelve plus selection examination envisaged by Fox as this would abrogate the parent's right to choose the type of schooling which he wanted for his children. In placing his proposals before the Legislative Assembly, the Prime Minister painted a picture of a child's school career which deserves extended quotation for the picture it gives of what a Milton boy would have experienced between 1910 and 1937:

"I would ask hon. members to picture for a moment a child of about eleven in Standard 4, sitting Job-like at his desk and contemplating the next six years at school. Next year in Standard 5 his whole life will become an intensive preparation for the Qualifying Examination and the Junior Beit Examination on which his future hangs. It will then be decided whether he is to share in the advantages of secondary education or go without. Let us suppose he passes and joins the elect in a high school. In Form I there are no examinations and there he enjoys a period of mental convalescence. In Form II he is initiated into the mysteries of Junior Certificate. His teacher warns him that there is no time to waste, as it is Junior Certificate next year. Or he is presented with some attractive-looking English books which he instinctively wants to read, but he finds on enquiry that they are not to be read; they are to be studied; they are set books for next year's Junior Certificate. The following January he enters the grave portals of Form III — which, by the way, is better known as Junior Certificate class. And there he and his teachers do exactly as they are told by the Junior Certificate syllabus. Homework, extra classes and examination tests remind him day and night of the approaching agony in December. At this time of the year, when

even grown-ups begin to wilt, our little galley-slave is condemned to double duty. And Christmas this year will find him fretting about the results. Well, again he passes, but there is worse to come! In Form IV he begins a two-year course leading to Matric, and now a group of gentlemen (the Joint Matriculation Board) take control of his education and tell the teachers exactly what to teach him. By hook or crook their pupils must prove their fitness to enter a university whether they are going there or not!"

Naturally such profound changes had considerable effects on every school in the country, but Milton more than most in that "as an exceptional arrangement", it was to run both academic and "modern" groups side by side; there were advantages to this, the most obvious of which, as the Headmaster pointed out, was that "it is easier to correct the mistakes we are bound to make when we try to assess a boy's aptitude at the early age of twelve". Naturally there was much parental opposition to the government's policy and it became a hotly debated political issue but Mr. Livingston eloquently defended it in his remarks on Speech Night at the end of 1937:

"Perhaps the simplest way to describe the difference between 'academic' and 'modern' is to say that the academic course leads up to a public examination, and so those taking such a course have to follow a prescribed syllabus. The modern course, on the other hand, has no public examination at the end of it. Teachers are therefore free to frame their own syllabuses with closer regard to the abilities and the interests and the future careers of their pupils. Except for the omission of Latin and French from the modern side, the subjects of the two courses are very much the same. It must be so, because English and Science and Maths and History and Geography and Music and Arts and Crafts form the basis of our civilisation. And I am not one of those who think that some boys should be confined to bookish study while others spend most of their time working with their hands. Books are a source of knowledge and pleasure to all; on the other hand, every boy should, in my opinion, learn to use his hands. What we are hoping to do by our modern courses is to free some boys from the stranglehold of unsuitable examinations."

A year later he returned to the fray with vigour: having again defended the modern side, pointing out that "the difference is that since they do not have to face an examination set by University professors they can

study these things in a manner more satisfactory to themselves”, he went on to deliver a warning that is as valid today as it was in 1938:

“In England the School Certificate is taken by selected candidates because it is impossible to get into an English secondary school without passing a test. In Rhodesia there is no test, the selection of the course being made by the parents. In England the percentage of passes is about seventy; in Rhodesia it must, I fear, be much lower. I urge parents who are thinking of putting their boys in for the academic course contrary to the schoolmaster’s advice to reflect whether it is wise to expose their sons to the harassing grind for an unsuitable examination with the probability of failure at the end.”

Whatever the educational merits of the new policy, one undoubted advantage of the introduction of a “modern side” was that Milton gained further new buildings — “two fine craft rooms, a spacious workshop for wood and metal, and a new general science laboratory . . . all equipped in up-to-date style”.⁴ One other innovation at this time was the introduction of a “Native Language Class” on a voluntary basis in 1936 and the teaching of Sindebele continued for several years; the school had been given a generous donation by Colonel H.T. Fenwick in memory of his friend, Maurice Heany, a member of the Pioneer Column, for this purpose. Regrettably, Livingston was never able to absorb the class into the regular curriculum and eventually the subject lapsed.

The other major change of 1938 was a restructuring of the House system; in the earliest days the school was divided into three houses — Milton (i.e. the boarders of Milton Hostel), North Town and South Town, but for the athletic sports the two town houses had to combine and were still beaten by the boarders. Subsequently the houses were reduced to two, the day boys being known initially as Day House and then rather more grandly as “Oppidans”.⁵ On the move to the new site, the boarders competed as houses — Charter and Pioneer — and so it remained for ten years, but at the end of 1937 the decision was taken to divide “the school into four houses for games, the object being to put day boys and boarders side by side in the same houses so that the former may take a more active part in the life of the school”. A look at inter-house competition results suggests that a corollary motive was to break the boarders’ dominance as, for example, they had never lost the athletics championships and in the ten years on the new site Charter and Pioneer had, curiously, each won it for five consecutive years. And so in 1938 four

new houses appeared —Birchenough, Borrow, Fairbridge and Heany⁶. And no sooner had the dust settled on the academic and sporting reorganisation of the school than it faced the upheaval of the Second World War.

Notes

¹ After his return to Cape Town, he wrote expressing his gratitude for “a marvellous four days which I shall never forget, something that I would not have missed for worlds. . . I have one regret: several times I should have liked to voice the feelings in my heart, and to try to explain what the whole affair meant to me, and how much I loved and appreciated all that you were doing. But I am a shocking bad hand at anything of that sort in public, so here I am penning these rather cold words much too late. Well, you must all forgive me and take the word for the deed.”

² Illness, however, prevented his attendance.

³ Himself an old boy of the school. He later became Chaplain of Plumtree.

⁴ These buildings form the south range of the quad now named after Mr. Livingston.

⁵ From the Latin “oppidum” — a town.

⁶ The only one of these four gentlemen to have any real connection with Milton was Sir Henry Birchenough, President of the B.S.A. Company from 1925 to 1937 and Chairman of the Beit Trust. He had also donated an annual Empire Day essay prize of £5 to the school. Henry Borrow was a Cornish soldier who was Adjutant of the Corps in the Pioneer Column; he died in 1893, aged 28, with Allan Wilson and the Shangani Patrol. Kingsley Fairbridge, the poet, is perhaps better remembered, particularly for his advocacy of farm schools and the outdoor life. Maurice Heany was a Virginian adventurer who was Captain of ‘A’ troop in the Pioneer Column and took part in the Jameson Raid before retiring to Bulawayo where he died in 1927.

Odds and Ends, 1931–1939

24 June 1931: En route for leave in England, the Governor, Sir Cecil Rodwell, visited the school, which celebrated a holiday on 10 July, the day the ship sailed from Cape Town.

August 1931: Trevor Wright¹ became the first Milton boy to pass the difficult Advanced Grade (Violin) Exam.

2 May 1932: The junior forms presented A.P. Herbert’s “Fat King Melon and the Princess Carraway”.

October 1932: A Science Society was formed and, in its first year, visited the Railway Workshops, the Flour Mills, the Acetylene Works, the Lonely Mine, the Telephone Exchange and the Printing Works.

- 13 June 1933: After a speech by Lord Lloyd on Britain's Royal Navy, a branch of the Navy League was formed at Milton. Membership was open to boys in Forms III, IV and V and soon the League boasted a membership of twenty boys.
- 30 September 1933: A school fete was held in aid of the Child Welfare Society; attractions included donkeys, a skittle-alley, coconut-shy and "The Great Mephisto".
- October 1933: Milton's first swimming colours were awarded to A.L. Painting who was a member of the Rhodesian Currie Cup team to visit Durban.
- 1934: Visitors to the school included Sir Alexander Godley, ex-Governor of Gibraltar, the Kunwar Sir Maharaj Singh, Agent-General in South Africa for the Government of India, and Colonel J.H. Patterson, D.S.O., the author of "The Man Eaters of Tsavo". The school also participated in the welcome for Prince George (later King George VI) and the Cadets paraded for his inspection on 28 March.
- 6 August 1934: On the occasion of the unveiling of the Livingstone Memorial at the Victoria Falls, the Head Prefect, J. Brown, laid a wreath on behalf of the school.
- October 1934: A Wireless Club was founded, giving rise "to many weird noises at Milton". Mr. Jackson donated a wireless set to the Club and members visited the Bulawayo Broadcasting Station.
- November 1934: The last silent film was shown at Milton: "A week ago we were informed that the day of the silent film was over — none, in fact, had been made for the past five years, so that no more will be shown in the Beit Hall . . . There was, however, a silver lining in this apparently blackest of clouds — if every boarder subscribed £1 we should be able to buy a 'talkie machine'."
- 24 January 1935: A Johannesburg branch of the Old Miltonians' Association was started with Joe Margolis as Chairman.
- September 1935: Milton won the Mim Du Toit Tennis Trophy by beating Prince Edward's by one game.
- 28 September 1935: P. Mansell took four wickets with consecutive balls whilst playing for the 1st XI against the Combined Banks.
- October 1935: Jock Thompson's "A History of Sport in Southern Rhodesia" was published.
- July 1935: In the 50th Plumtree match, played at the B.A.C. Ground, Milton lost 0-23.

- April 1937: The school bought a sound projector and the first film to be shown was “Little Miss Marker”, a Shirley Temple film, “but not up to the usual standard of the productions of the juvenile star”.
- July 1937: The Carl Rosa Opera Company visited Bulawayo and about forty boys attended a matinee of “Cavalleria Rusticana” and “I Pagliacci”; so enthusiastic were they that “a great number resolved to see the next matinee performance of ‘Carmen’. One boy, whose pocket money had been exhausted, was so enthusiastic with the beauty of the opera that he sold a pair of his trousers to obtain the money necessary for admission”.
- September 1937: At the suggestion of Mr. Jackson, Pioneer House started a model plane club. On Speech Night, the Headmaster commented: “Although the law of gravity has proved as intractable as ever, many of the machines are a credit to their youthful constructors”.
- October 1937: The “Ten Club” was formed to discuss world problems of the day.
- 5–6 November 1937: Plumtree beat Milton by four wickets in the 50th cricket match.
- 23 April 1938: In the first Plumtree–Milton Athletics Meeting, Plumtree won by 24 points to 18.
- 28 November 1938: At Speech Night, the Mayor announced that “an application by the School Council to the Municipality asking for 500,000 gallons of water a month for the maintenance of the school sports grounds had been considered and passed by the Bulawayo Town Council”.
- September 1938: Milton won the Mim Du Toit for the fourth successive year.
- May 1939: Visitors to the school were Sir John Chancellor and Lady Beit, both in Rhodesia for the opening of the Otto Beit Bridge at Chirundu.
- September 1939: Milton lost the Mim Du Toit Cup to Prince Edward by one game.
- 3 November 1939: The guest at Speech Night was the Governor, Sir Herbert Stanley, who was paying his first official visit to Milton.

Notes

¹ Later General Manager of Rhodesia Railways.