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# Messiter-Tooze and the Golden Jubilee, 1956–1963

*'Headmasters have powers at their disposal with which  
Prime Ministers have never yet been invested'*

Winston Churchill.

*'Hurrah! hurrah! we bring the Jubilee!'*

H.C. Work.

MILTON'S new headmaster in 1956 was C.R. Messiter-Tooze; after wartime service with the R.A.F., he had gone to Umtali and then in 1952 to Churchill as deputy headmaster. His eight years at Milton were in many ways the most spectacular in the school's entire history: the Golden Jubilee occurred in the middle of his tenure and the years leading up to it saw Milton's numbers soar in an unprecedented fashion. In 1954 there had been 644 pupils with thirty-six members of staff and there were still sufficient classrooms for each form to have its own, but in Mr. Messiter-Tooze's first year, the enrolment had passed seven hundred, making Milton the second largest school in the Federation and compelling the use of hostel prep-rooms again. In the course of 1957 a new Art Block that also contained four ordinary classrooms came into use but the following year numbers went over nine hundred and the cycle began again. That same year saw the first reorganisation of games houses in twenty years; with over two hundred boys per house, too many had no opportunity to play a part and four new houses were created — Brady, Chancellor, Malvern and Rhodes<sup>1</sup>. The boarders were still spread over the eight games houses but the arrangement lasted only three years; in 1961 Malvern and Brady were dropped and the boarders again competed as Charter and Pioneer. The main reason for this seems to have been to improve house spirit amongst the boarders and to bring seniors and

juniors in the hostels closer together. That they had only half the numbers of the day houses did not seem too serious a disadvantage and Charter promptly celebrated its emancipation by winning the inter-house athletics. This new arrangement lasted until 1978 when numbers in the school had dropped to below seven hundred; Chancellor disappeared and its membership was distributed amongst the other five day houses whilst Charter and Pioneer combined for competition purposes as Boarders after a brief flirtation with the name Selous<sup>2</sup>, thus producing six houses with a roughly equal number of boys in each<sup>3</sup>.

1959 marked the end of an era for it saw the retirement of two of Milton's most renowned and longest-serving figures, F.G. — "Putt" — Jackson and Lewis Jones, almost universally known as Jonas. Putt had been at Milton for thirty-seven years, the first three of them on the Borrow Street site, the last eleven as deputy headmaster and he had been Pioneer housemaster for the same length of time, having inherited both positions from Jerry Downing in 1948. An anonymous Old Miltonian paid him tribute on his retirement:

"Seldom does a man become a legend in his own lifetime. There are few humans so notable for devoted service, loyalty, wisdom and helpfulness as to become identified with the schools they serve. Yet it is remarkable that whenever Miltonians gather, the first question is 'How's old Putt?' and the second 'How is Milton?'.

"We all know that Mr. Jackson has been unremitting in his efforts for the school since 1924, and that almost all his boundless energy has been focused on the well-being and good reputation of the school and its scholars. It is doubtful if anyone in the long history of the school has done so much by direct precept or simple example to shape and guide all those who live and work in it . . .

"Generations of children some years later would be able to trace some notion of conduct or sportsmanship to Room 8, Milton School. It is not an exaggeration to say that many of the most useful citizens in every walk of life owe their sense of responsibility and fair play in no small measure to Mr. Jackson."

Later the same year the school also bade farewell to Jonas — or Bok as he was often known to the boys because of his genial spirits and social life: the explanation appeared in "The Weekly Jet", the first boys' paper at the school — "Bok, a gay, young, spritely animal". Jonas had come to Milton in 1938 and was resident in Pioneer with Putt Jackson for almost

sixteen years. During his time at Milton he had been both senior english master and senior history master and had acted as deputy headmaster, refusing on more than one occasion the offer of promotion to the Education Department's administrators, and thereby depriving the country, in the opinion of many who knew him, of an outstanding Secretary for Education. He was charming, witty and a master of subtle and superb repartee and to the school — staff and boys — “a truly great man, one of the few who have done so much to uphold the traditions of the school and to have moulded the character of thousands of boys who have done so well in all walks of life. In every respect he carried out the spirit of the school's motto: ‘he played the game and quit himself like a man’”.<sup>4</sup>

During the fifties Milton's teams made several tours, the first in more than a quarter of a century; in 1927 the Cricket XI had visited Hilton and King Edward VII, drawing the one match and losing the other by an innings, and the following year the Rugby XV had gone to Natal, played three matches, conceded eighty-three points and scored not one. Perhaps chastened by these experiences, it was not until 1956 that a Milton side again ventured over the Limpopo, although the school had been strongly represented in a Matabele-Midlands Schools team that had toured Western Province two years earlier. The 1956 side was one of Milton's strongest and in five hard fought matches it only went down once, 11-16 to Maritzburg College, defeating Durban Boys' High (8-5), Kearsney College (18-0), Michaelhouse (6-3) and Port Shepstone High (12-6). In the following years both cricket and rugby sides visited Northern Rhodesia and in 1959 the 1st XI toured Nyasaland. During the sixties the 1st XV toured South Africa more years than not, though never more successfully than in 1963 when all five matches in the Northern Transvaal were won convincingly — Milton scored ninety-three points and gave away but twelve. That same team, perhaps not surprisingly, went on to win all its games, including two victories over Plumtree, one of which was the hundredth match. The final tally was: played 16, won 16, points for 398, points against 98.

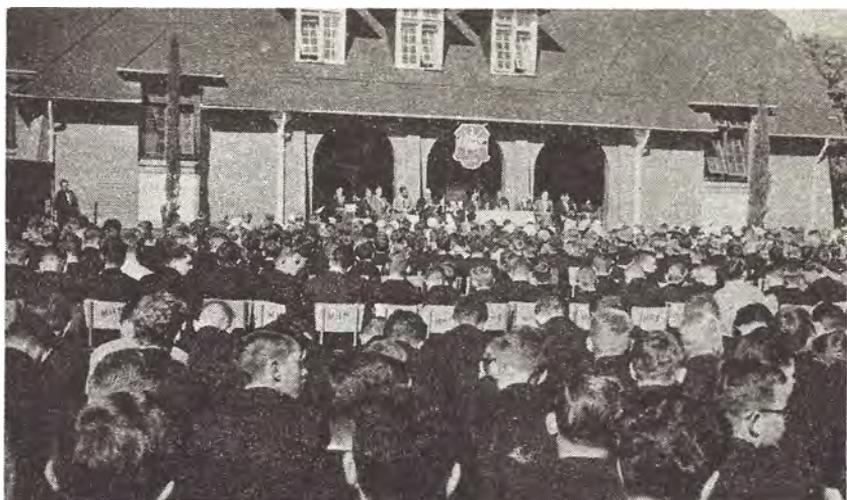
Milton had become the largest school in the Federation in 1960 when the enrolment went over the thousand — it was certainly one way of celebrating the fiftieth birthday. Partly out of sheer necessity and partly to commemorate the Golden Jubilee much building was going on and more was under consideration. Mr. Messiter-Tooze had made an impact on the school's appearance from his first year — by the end of 1956 the

Miltonian was reporting that:

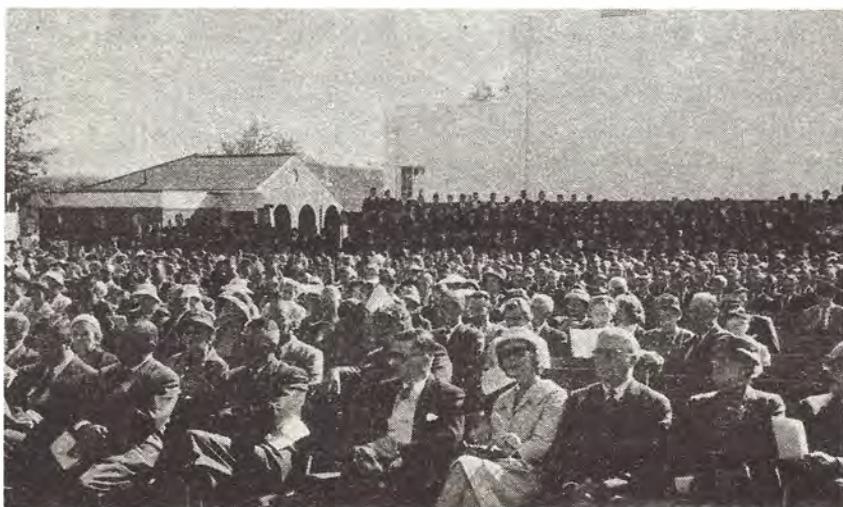
“New blackboards and floors have been put in many of the classrooms; new playing fields are being developed on the other side of Selborne Avenue<sup>5</sup> . . . and tarmac has been laid down on the roads around the school and also on the quadrangle between the Beit Hall and the dining hall — so that in future rainy seasons it will be possible to walk from place to place without squelching ankle deep in red mud.”

In that same year a Parent-Teachers' Association was formed for the first time and began fund-raising on a substantial scale with an eye to the Golden Jubilee and the proposed extensions to the Beit Hall. This suffered from two principal drawbacks: it lacked a stage and any technical facilities which meant that Milton dramatics had either to move elsewhere or make do with primitive and improvised equipment; and, despite the asbestos experiment, the acoustics remained unacceptable for speech. So successful was the P.T.A.'s fund-raising that the hall was renovated in time for the jubilee when it had originally been intended to start work not much before then. It was provided with a spacious stage and fly-tower, dressing-rooms, green room and a large under-stage assembly/storage area as well as a superb lighting box, enabling the headmaster safely to say “there is no finer or better equipped hall and stage anywhere in the Federation”. A plaster ceiling was added, although the original beams still survive above it, and the reconstructed hall was christened in the last week of July with a production of “Henry V”, although it was a near thing as the technical installation was only completed days before the first performance.

Building on other areas was going on apace when the actual birthday arrived, an event somewhat marred by the collapse of Mr. Messiter-Tooze a month earlier with severe strain; as a result, he was not allowed to take any active part in the celebrations he had done so much to organise although he was allowed to attend the Jubilee Service and Speech Day, but not to make a speech<sup>6</sup>. The celebrations were actually held nine days too soon on Saturday 16 July; a committee had been established a year earlier to make detailed arrangements and, according to the minutes, “Mr. Jackson informed the meeting that the school was officially opened on the 10th July 1910 by Sir William Milton. It was agreed that in 1960, Jubilee Day should be on the 15th July as the 10th July will not be suitable falling in the Rhodes and Founders weekend”. Subsequently the committee decided that Saturday would be a more

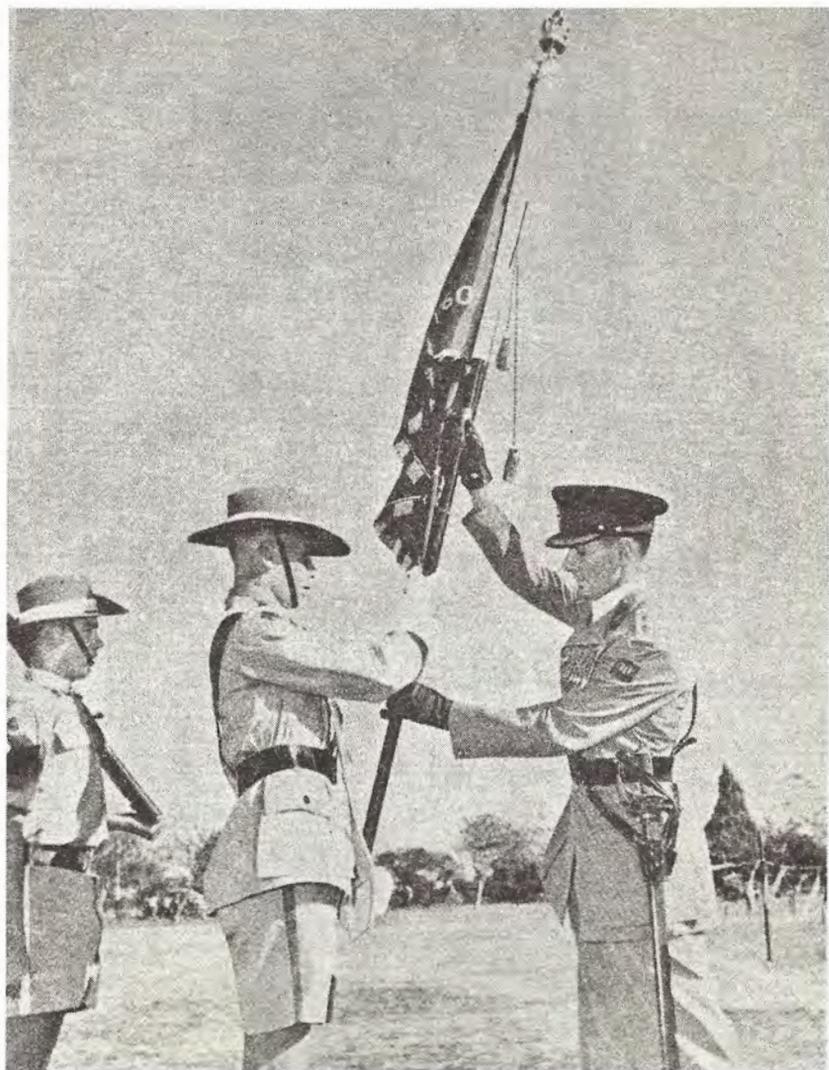


**Golden Jubilee Speech Day, 16 July 1960.**





**Sir Humphrey Gibbs speaking at the Golden Jubilee Speech Day. Left to right: F.G. Jackson; F.A. Hambly, Deputy Headmaster; The Revd. R.L. Cranswick; C.R. Messiter-Tooze, Headmaster; Clr. S.H. Millar, Mayor of Bulawayo.**



**Col. R.A.G. Prentice presenting the Standard at the Golden Jubilee Parade, 15 July 1960.**



**J.H. Downing, 1950-1955.**



**C.R. Messiter-Tooze, 1956-1963.**

suitable day than Friday for the main celebrations but presumably their arrangements were too far advanced to change that date when the mistake was discovered.

The Jubilee began on the afternoon of Friday 15 July with an impressive Cadet Inspection and Parade at which General R.B. Long was to have carried out the inspection and the presentation of the standard, but in the event he was unable to leave Salisbury because of the gravity of the situation in the newly independent Belgian Congo and Colonel (subsequently Brigadier) R.A.G. Prentice took his place, presenting a standard recently arrived from England.

The following morning the whole school and many friends and guests assembled in the School (now Morgan) Quadrangle; it was felt that it would be wrong to take such an event away from Milton and accordingly the service and speeches took place in the open. The weather had caused some anxiety for most of the week had been cold and windy but in the event the sun shone on Milton's birthday — almost too much so and some without any shade became distinctly uncomfortable. Fortunately the speeches appear to have been brief. The service was taken by the Revd. Rupert Cranswick, an Old Miltonian and Rhodes Scholar, and the speakers included the Governor of Southern Rhodesia, Sir Humphrey Gibbs, the Mayor of Bulawayo, Councillor S.H. Millar, the Vice-Chairman of the School Council, T.M. Brewis, and the Acting Headmaster, F.A. Hambly.

The formal part of the proceedings was followed by tea in the Beit Hall (with the school's dance band in attendance), and an all male luncheon (tickets 15/-) at the Grand Hotel Crystal Court. Rugby in the afternoon was highly satisfactory: the 2nd XV having defeated Plumtree, the Firsts, after an even first-half struggle, went on to inflict the biggest defeat on Plumtree in thirty years, 26-0. The day was rounded off with a Jubilee Ball in the McMurray Hall.

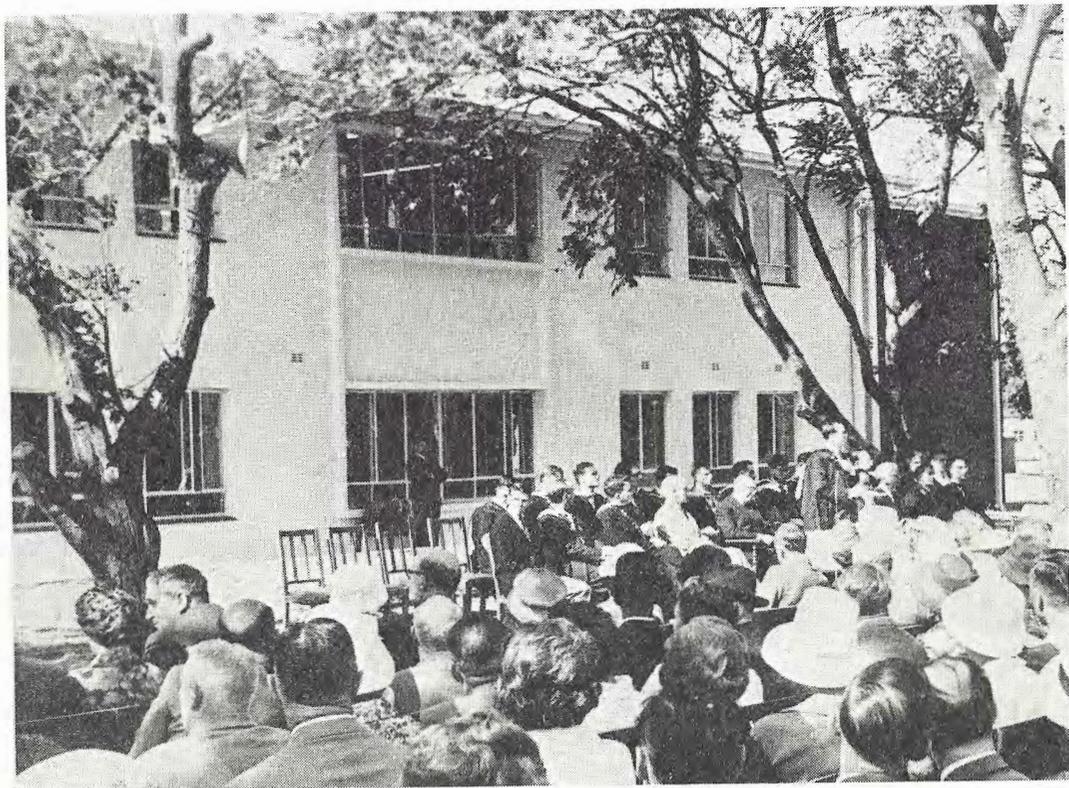
1961 marked the climax with regard to both numbers and the building programme: something over 1150 boys were taught by 70 members of staff<sup>7</sup> and the next seventeen years saw a steady retreat from these figures. The most impressive of the new buildings was undoubtedly the Department of Sixth Form Studies which was constructed in two separate blocks — arts and science. The superbly equipped science block contained separate labs for all the sciences and was in use at the beginning of 1960; the arts block was completed by the following year and included a well-stocked reference library and the whole complex was

officially opened on 30 September 1961 by the Minister of Education, D.B. Goldberg, when the headmaster, with some justice, "confidently claimed that the school now has the finest Department of Sixth Form Studies in Africa". 150 Milton boys had moved into this splendid isolation where they were subsequently joined by sixth formers from girls' schools unable to offer the required courses. As well as being the Federation's largest school, Milton was now the best equipped and offered the widest range of subjects — a total of twenty-six.

The new Sixth Form Centre was, however, only one of several ambitious projects which went on at this time: 1961 also saw the completion of both a new economics and commerce department with, above it, a staff room and marking room and also the double storey administration block. It is interesting, if ultimately futile, to speculate on the motives of architects who lovingly prepared plans for an economics department that harmonised perfectly with the original surroundings and at the same time planted that standard, featureless, modern-style, concrete construction firmly across the fourth side of the Brady Quad, one of the oldest parts of the school. During 1962 a new technical block was built, comprising "a light engineering and metalwork shop, an additional woodwork shop, a special technical drawing office and storerooms". Locking cycle sheds were constructed, a rifle range was built, stands were erected on the playing fields and roads and parking places tarred. And still it was not enough: over £100,000 had been spent but the Headmaster complained that "we are still short of nine permanent classrooms and are continuing to make use of hostel prep rooms, glassed in verandahs and terrapins". He predicted that the end of the problem was in sight and it was, but not for the reason he gave — from 1962 onwards numbers slowly began to fall and the situation righted itself, not to recur until the present time.

At Speech Night in 1961 the Headmaster was at some pains to point out to parents that Milton's size was neither accident nor the result of expediency but a planned experiment by the Ministry of Education; he attempted to calm their fears "that the administration may become impersonal and that your children will not receive individual attention and personal care", pointing out that to this end the school had been divided, "like Gaul", into three parts, each with its own head of division who would take a personal interest in each boy:

"You can be happy that there is no danger of this school developing into a soulless machine and failing to take a personal



**The Opening of the Sixth Form Centre, 30 September 1961.**



**P.M. Brett, 1964-1969.**



**R.K. Gracie, 1970-1980.**

interest in the problems of its individual members. One of the advantages of this size school is that there are always two people keeping an eye on the boys' progress throughout the school — the head of division and myself. I might say it's a case of 'two heads being better than one!'

In fact a slow retreat from the peak of 1961–62 set in almost immediately and numbers fell from 1178 in 1962 to 1088 in 1963 and 1008 in 1964; although the break-up of Federation reduced the pressure on schools very considerably, re-zoning and the abandonment of the policy of heads of division suggests a tacit admission on the Government's part that schools *were* becoming too big. Certainly the end of Federation deprived Milton of one additional building; in 1962 the headmaster reported that "plans for 1963 provide for a double-storey block of eight classrooms of a somewhat unusual design. This 'Audio-Visual' Block will be dual purpose in that the rooms or studies can be used as ordinary classrooms or for closed circuit television instruction". The school conducted experiments with closed-circuit television on behalf of the Ministry during 1963 and the results seemed to show that it would be a most valuable teaching medium, but the block did not survive on the estimates for that year and, when the retrenchment consequent upon the dissolution of the Federation set in, the plans, although complete, were mentioned no more and Milton lost what would undoubtedly have been a remarkable, indeed in Rhodesia unique, complex.<sup>8</sup>

There was another loss in 1962 — Fred Hambly's departure to the newly created post of Assistant Regional Director of Education was confirmed: he had come to Milton in January 1939 to teach Latin — and to take over the 1st XV, a task which he did not relinquish in the twenty-two years he spent at Milton. He became Deputy Headmaster on the retirement of Putt Jackson in 1959 but was seconded to the Ministry in the third term of 1961, to have his appointment confirmed a year later. However, he continued to support Milton rugby and it is remarkable to record that he never missed a home match of the 1st XV from the day of his arrival in 1939 to the day of his death in 1971.<sup>9</sup> On 10th August 1968, some forty years after it was first used, the main Milton rugby field was given a name and it seemed only fitting that it should be the name of the man who had given so much time to the school's rugby and whose name was known and loved by generations of Old Miltonians: "in the knowledge that future Milton boys will honour and remember a great schoolmaster, the field was duly named the Hambly Field".

The end of Federation brought many changes in its wake, of which the most immediate was the departure of Mr. Messiter-Tooze and more than twenty members of his staff at the end of 1963. Nevertheless, in his eight years he had built well and Milton had many occasions in the dark and difficult years of U.D.I., sanctions and war to remember him with gratitude — as indeed it still has.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The provenance of all four names is too obvious to require explanation, except perhaps for a reminder that Malvern was the title taken by Sir Godfrey Huggins when he was raised to the peerage.

<sup>2</sup>At the same time, the hostels combined into one "house", Pioneer taking boys from Forms I to III and Charter IV to VI; whether the games house re-organisation anticipated or precipitated this change is a moot point.

<sup>3</sup>Despite the vast increase in numbers in recent years, this arrangement is still in force.

<sup>4</sup>Both of these Grand Old Miltonians still enjoy their well-earned retirement, Putt by the sea in Cape Town and Jonas in Bulawayo where he has lived at the Club for many years. The commercial acumen for which he was always renowned is now in the service of St. John's where he is Cathedral Treasurer.

<sup>5</sup>What became known as the Thompson Fields (see Ch. 2); a borehole was sunk and a pumping plant installed and over the next few years six rugby pitches, two soccer pitches and four cricket wickets were established. The proposed athletics track, with a central baseball diamond, did not, however, materialise and the northern end of the site remains undeveloped. In the last few years several hundred gums have been planted there on National Tree Planting Day.

<sup>6</sup>His appearance had not been expected by the school and "when the scholars realised that he had taken his place on the platform, he received a tremendous ovation".

<sup>7</sup>Compare this to current staff : pupil ratios; 45 teachers would now be considered sufficient for these numbers.

<sup>8</sup>It was to have been sited between the two hostels where the Armoury — now the boarder prefects' common room — stands.

<sup>9</sup>When his daughter was getting married, Fred insisted that the wedding should be on a Saturday morning so that he would not miss a home game that afternoon.

## Odds and Ends, 1956–1963

- January 1956: A Fencing Club began at Milton as a junior section of the Matabeleland Fencing Club.
- 24 January 1956: A meeting of parents was held to discuss the formation of a Parent-Teachers' Association; the idea was well received and on 9 March a committee meeting was held.
- May 1956: Duly and Co. began work on clearing the ground on what became the Thompson Fields; the work was done free of charge.
- 3 August 1956: The guest at Speech Night was Sir Roy Welensky, Federal Minister of Transport and Communications, who claimed that "the so-called colour problem is largely a problem of poverty and ignorance, a problem of being undercut in one's job and of having one's standard of living lowered".
- 25 October 1956: The Milton School Judo Club was officially formed after a two-month trial period — the Kano system was adopted and the instructor was Mr. Cullum, who had "a fourth Kyu grading from the famous Budokwai in London".
- 1st Term 1957: Milton, like the entire country, was much affected by the polio epidemic: the school sports were cancelled and the play, "Arsenic and Old Lace", postponed by a term.
- March 1957: The University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland opened its doors for its first intake of students.
- April 1957: Sir Ellis Robins, Resident Director of the Chartered Company for many years, visited the school immediately prior to his departure for Britain on retirement.
- 26 July 1957: The Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, Garfield Todd, was guest at Speech Night and told the boys that "this world needs even more than the great scientists and leaders of industry — simply fine men".
- August 1957: Asian 'flu swept through the school and the annual Cadet Camp had to be cancelled
- June 1958: Sir Ellis and Lady Robins again visited Milton and, on behalf of the British South Africa Company, presented the school with the portrait of Sir William Milton that still hangs in the Beit Hall.<sup>1</sup>
- 13 June 1958: The guest at Speech Night was the Governor-General of the Federation, the Earl of Dalhousie. In thanking him, the Head Boy remarked that Speech Night was "a memorable occasion but it would be even more memorable if the school was granted the

- holiday which His Excellency had promised some time previously. His Excellency stood up and stated that on his previous visit to the school, everyone seemed to be working so hard that it seemed a pity to disturb them. However, if a holiday was required, the school should have it”.
- June 1958: The masters took part in a rugby match with the boys “and demonstrated their superiority with a good win”. The referee was Putt Jackson.
- July 1958: A Fun Fair was held at the school in aid of the Beit Hall Building Fund.
- July 1958: A party of boys and three members of staff, including the headmaster, travelled to the Kariba Dam site and were shown around the workings.
- 2nd Term 1959: The Miltonian announced “with deep regret that the boys appeared to find it impossible to field a rugby team against the staff.”
- 10 October 1959: Milton’s most impressive Fun Fair to date was held and raised over £1000.
- January 1960: Richard Harlen created a school academic record by obtaining three distinctions in the Higher School Certificate Examination.
- January 1960: Mr. and Mrs. L.R. Wynn presented a ship’s bell to the school in memory of their son, Adrian, who died as a result of a hole in the heart operation in London. The bell, which replaced an old piece of railway line, still hangs from the side of the Beit Hall<sup>2</sup>.
- 11 August 1962: Teachers from all Bulawayo Schools gathered in the Beit Hall to watch the first experimental programmes in educational television.
- August 1962: The guest at Speech Night was the Prime Minister, Sir Edgar Whitehead.
- November 1962: A record number of candidates sat a complete range of public examinations:<sup>3</sup>
- 247 C.O.P. candidates
  - 172 C.S.C. candidates
  - 79 supplementary candidates for C.S.C.
  - 101 H.S.C. candidates
  - 29 A.E.B. “M” level candidates
  - 11 A.E.B. “A” level candidates
- a total of 639 entries. The school hall was quite inadequate for

such numbers and the Ministry authorised the hiring of additional halls at the Agricultural Showgrounds.

20 July 1963: The 100th Milton-Plumtree rugby match was won by Milton 23–6; it was followed by a sundowner and dance.

9 August 1963: For the second consecutive year, the guest at Speech Night was the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, but this time it was Winston Field, who had defeated Sir Edgar Whitehead in the General Election of December 1962.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It was painted by Captain Douglas Wales-Smith and was a copy of the portrait then hanging in the Parliament Buildings in Salisbury. This was the only one in the country and had been painted posthumously from photographs. Sir Ellis persuaded the Company to present the portrait when he discovered that the school possessed no picture or portrait of Milton — what happened to the photograph presented by the O.M.s at the Silver Jubilee is a mystery.

<sup>2</sup> It has, of course, been long superceded by a far less musical siren — but still comes in useful when the marvels of modern science fail.

<sup>3</sup> It is a record that may well not survive much longer: in November 1985 entries for A.E.B., Cambridge and internal examinations will top the six hundred mark.