

THE NORTON STORY



RHODESIA

*Visitors to the 15th World
Ploughing Championships may
be interested in the history of
Norton and its area.*

*The Zeederberg mail coach
passed regularly
through Norton.*

THE Kent Estate on which the contest is being held was, a hundred years ago, part of an extensive area over which hundreds of elephants roamed. In the vlei, a marshy place which lies below the homestead of Kent Estate, these great animals used to wallow in mud-baths, and rub themselves against a big tree which is still standing, before moving to the Hunyani River. Seeking them came hunters who made their way every dry season from South Africa, making a road which led through the estate. Less than a hundred years ago, in 1870, several hunters, declaring they were not afraid of fever, stayed during the rains and paid for their daring with their lives.



Early in February, 1896, Norton and his party left England. They reached the farm, called "Porta", erected buildings and started to fence some portions of the land.

It was not known that the Mashonas, inspired by a messenger from the Matabele who were already in rebellion, had determined also to attack the Europeans. The leader in the area was the chief, Matshayangombi.

On June 16th, 1896, several murders were committed near his village. On the 17th, when the Africans employed by Norton did not turn up to work, Talbot was sent on his bicycle to report the matter to Salisbury. Norton visited the village where his labourers lived and was never seen alive again. During the day the homestead was attacked. Mrs. Norton, the nurse and Gravenor put up a spirited defence

but were overpowered and murdered. The dead bodies were then dragged outside, the premises looted for men's clothing, furniture smashed and some of the buildings set on fire. Alexander was killed away from the home.

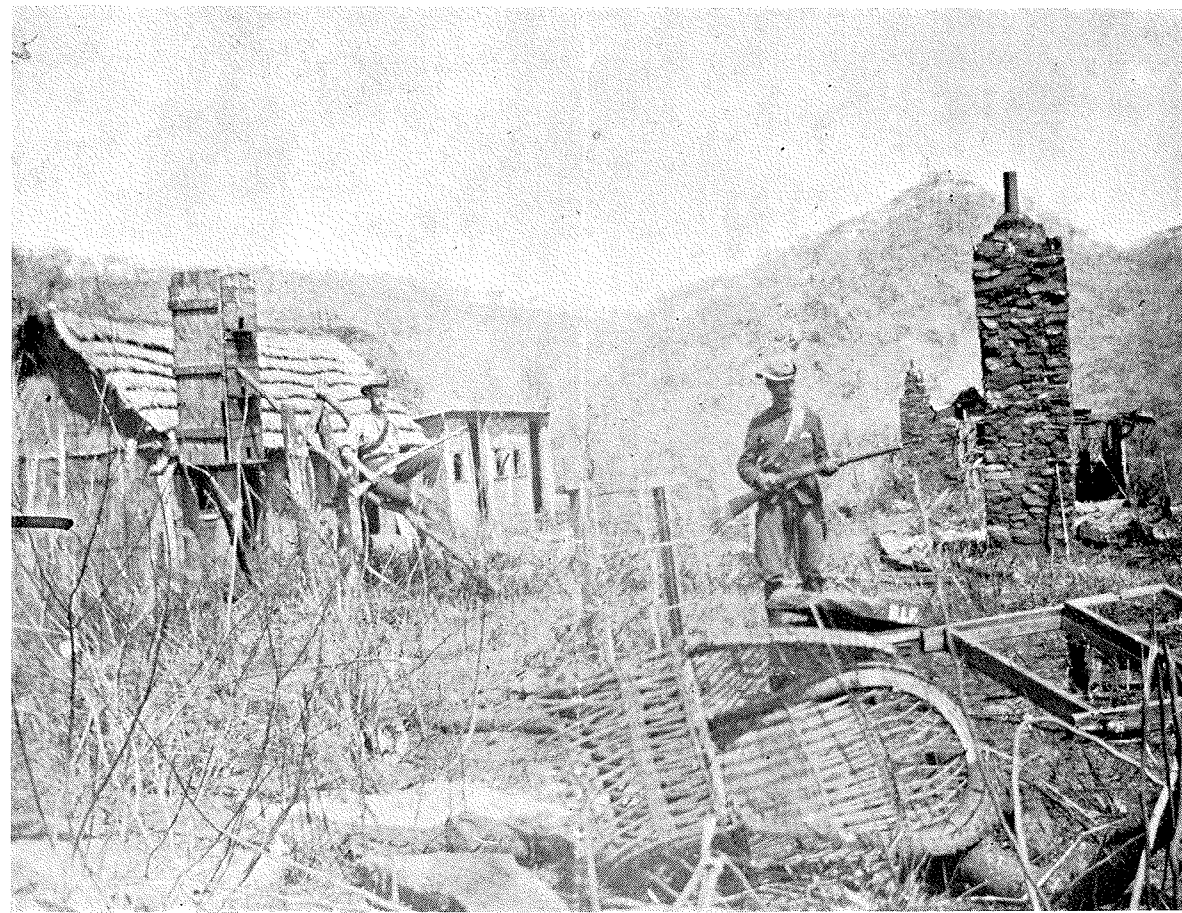
Talbot returned in the evening and, finding the dead bodies, immediately started again for Salisbury. He met a trooper, who returned with him to see for himself what had happened. The next day a patrol was sent out and the victims were buried under a flat-topped acacia tree. A memorial cross marks the graves. This, which is in the grounds of what is now the waterworks connected with Lake Mellwaine, may be visited.

Owing to a scarcity of food and the wet season it was not possible to bring Matshayangombi and his people to account until March, 1897.

The Instructors' Flying School at Norton was a vital part of the Empire Air Training Scheme in Rhodesia.



The ruins of "Porta" farmhouse destroyed in the 1896 rebellion.



The township of Norton takes its name from a family connected with Rhodesian history in a tragic incident.

In 1890, the Pioneer Column occupied Mashonaland and made the first settlement at Salisbury. Six years later, the Mashonas, the African tribes who lived in the area, rose in rebellion.

Joseph Norton was a well-to-do farmer from Yorkshire. He had obtained, by grant and purchase, seventeen thousand acres of land on the banks of the Hunyani River and planned to breed cattle. To help him in his work he employed three assistants, Talbot, Alexander and Gravenor. He had married a York-



Part of the industrial expansion of Norton.

Then, after three hours' fighting, Matshayangombi was killed and his forces defeated.

There was agricultural development around Norton until 1939. Then, when the Second World War broke out, Rhodesia with its cloudless skies, vast open spaces and its remoteness from enemy interference, offered facilities for the Empire Air Training Scheme. A Flying Instructors' School was placed at the little village of Norton which had been established on the high ground south of the Hunyani. Here hundreds of pilots who played their part in the defeat of the Axis received advanced training. In all, some 10,000 Empire and allied aircrew were trained in Rhodesia during the war years.

As the scheme achieved its purpose the airmen were withdrawn and

their buildings were used for German internees. Then, when these had gone, the permanent buildings became a school which has earned for itself an excellent reputation.

Meanwhile Salisbury needed additional water supplies for its rapidly increasing residential development and industrial expansion. Near the site of the Norton's home the Hunyani River breaks through a line of hills. Here it was decided to build a wall to form Lake McIlwaine, to meet Salisbury's requirements. Around the lake is a game park in which there are different species of wild animals, including rhinoceros and giraffe.

Norton's nearness to Salisbury, its abundant water supply and the availability of cheap electricity give hope that it may become an important industrial centre.



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