

A postcard from Salisbury, 7th April 1896

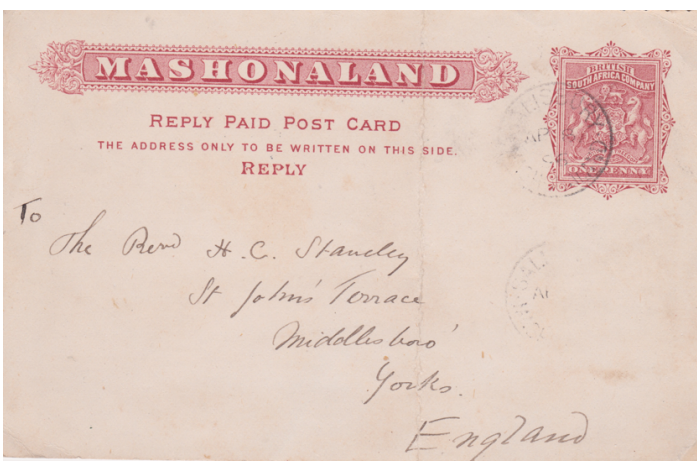
RHODESIA BSA COMPANY 1d reply paid postal stationary card. Cancelled SALISBURY, MASHONALAND
Single circle and partial strike below, the correspondent provides a contemporary account.

Accounts and interpretations of the events and confrontations in Matabeleland and Mashonaland between June 1896 - June 97 differ considerably. In March 1896, the Matabele rebelled against the authority of the British South Africa Company. The *Mlimo* or Matabele spiritual leader, was credited with fomenting much of the anger that led to this confrontation. He convinced the Matabele and the Shona that the settlers (almost 4,000-strong by then) were responsible for the drought, locust plagues and the rinderpest cattle disease ravaging the country at the time.

The First Chimurenga dramatically illustrated *'the sense of distrust and hostility that was engendered by a breakdown of communications, hampered by an inability to speak each other's languages and intensified by a sense of cultural alienation'* between the white settlers and native leaders during the early years of British South Africa Company administration.

Within days, the white settlers of Charter, Enkeldoorn, Victoria and Umtali went into laager on hearing news of disturbances. In this tinder dry atmosphere, incidents of local violence were interpreted as being part of a 'general rebellion'.

This was the context in which A. G. Standly wrote a postcard from Salisbury dated 7th April 1897 to his family in Middlesborough, England –



Salisbury, April 7th Dear H, In Salisbury again, now just out of hospital where I've been for 10 days with fever (at a guinea a day). I wrote you a short note from hospital but wonder if it was posted, they are so casual. It had a 8d stamp on it too. I send you the new card we now use up here. The Rhodesia horse is moving out to help suppress the Matabele rising; some went yesterday, 100 men, 19 waggons & 80 horses. I am sick at not being able to go with them but I have a contract to finish that will take me at least 6 weeks. When that's up, I think I shall have a shot at this railway they are building here as living on the line will be so much cheaper. There is now a sort of famine in Salisbury. The government has commandeered most of the food there is in town & transport has been stopped owing to cattle disease. In fact most of the oxen are dead. Flour 100lb bags were yesterday at £8.10 – today you can't get them for money at all. I suppose we will live through it somehow. I am awfully discontented just now & shall be until I get out of this place. Rhodes is ill with fever. Most of the offices & stores closed & whole place topsy turvy. Petly, a cousin of A.N.P., who was ordained here, has come up from Umtali. He is going down as a chaplain to the column, chiefly because he is a good shot. At present he is in hospital but is determined to go. Yrs A.G.S.

Note: the interesting message on the reverse reads: "Salisbury, April 7th, Dear H, In Salisbury again, now just out of hospital where I've been for 10 days with fever (at a guinea a day). I wrote you a short note from hospital but wonder if it was posted, they are so casual. It had a 8d stamp on it too. I send you the new card we now use up here. The Rhodesia horse is moving out to help suppress the Matabele rising; some went yesterday, 100 men, 19 waggons & 80 horses. I am sick at not being able to go with them but I have a contract to finish that will take me at least 6 weeks. When that's up, I think I shall have a shot at this railway they are building here as living on the line will be so much cheaper. There is now a sort of famine in Salisbury. The government has commandeered most of the food there is in town & transport has been stopped owing to cattle disease. In fact most of the oxen are dead. Flour 100lb bags were yesterday at £8.10 – today you can't get them for money at all. I suppose we will live through it somehow. I am awfully discontented just now & shall be until I get out of this place. Rhodes is ill with fever. Most of the offices & stores closed & whole place topsy turvy. Petly, a cousin of A.N.P., who was ordained here, has come up from Umtali. He is going down as a chaplain to the column, chiefly because he is a good shot. At present he is in hospital but is determined to go. Yrs A.G.S."

We are supposed to be at 'peace' with the natives. Personally, I fail to see in what way we are at peace. No one can go six miles off the main road without being fired on from behind rocks.

(Rev J.W. Stanlake, Wesleyan Mission Diaries April 1896)

Reminiscences of Native Commissioner 'Wiri' Edwards, penned on the veranda of the Old Marandellas Hotel at the end of the First Chimurenga in 1897:

We knew nothing of their past history, who they were or where they came from, and although many of the Native Commissioners had a working knowledge of their language, none of us really understood the people or could follow their line of thought. We were inclined to look down on them as a downtrodden race who were grateful to the white man for protection.

Reference: Mark Horn. *Chimurenga 1896-97: a Revisionist Study*, Master's Thesis, Rhodes University, 1986