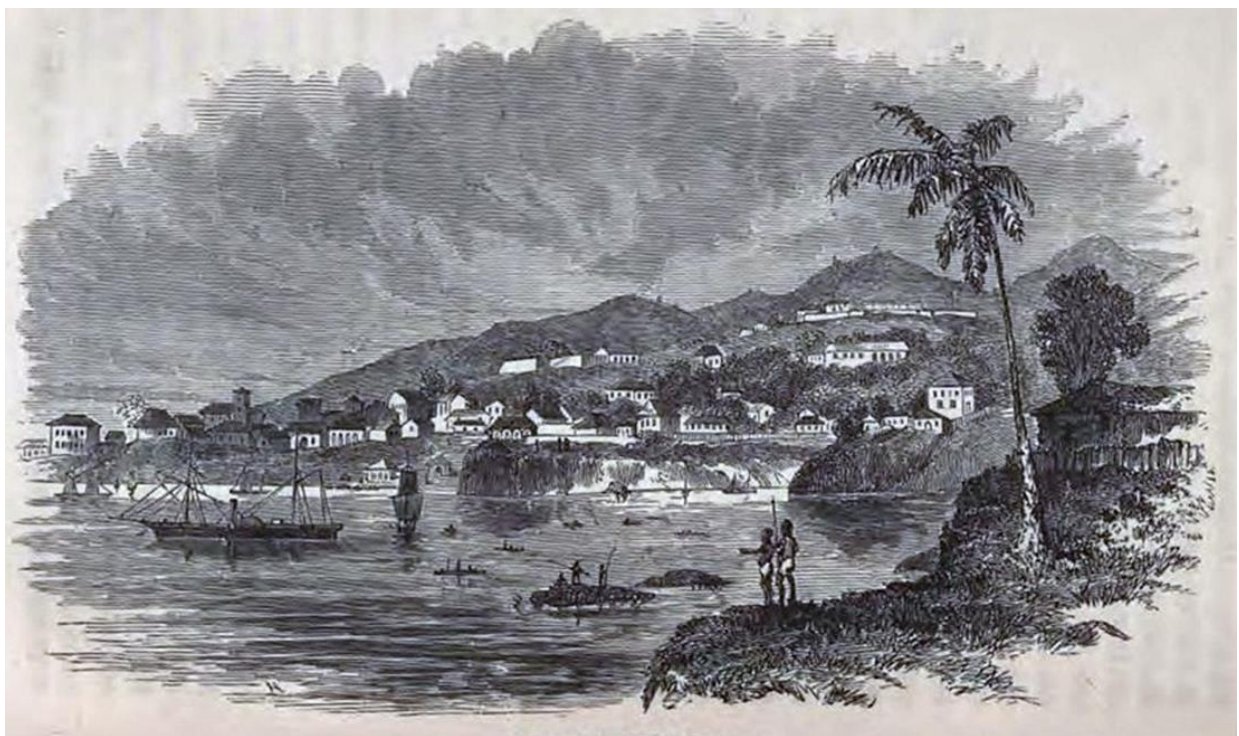


The Journal of Sierra Leone Studies



Volume 5 - Number 2 - October 2016

Welcome to The Journal of Sierra Leone Studies

This is the first Journal dedicated solely to Sierra Leone to have been published for a long time. We hope that it will be of use to academics, students and anyone with an interest in what for many is a rather 'special' country. The Journal will not concentrate on one area of academic study and invites contributions from anyone researching and writing on Sierra Leone to send their articles to: [John Birchall](#) for consideration.

Prospective contributions should be between 3500-5000 words in length, though we will in special circumstances consider longer articles and authors can select whether they wish to be peer reviewed or not. Articles should not have appeared in any other published form before. The Editorial Board reserves the right to suggest changes they consider are needed to the relevant author (s) and to not publish if such recommendations are ignored.

We are particularly interested to encourage students working on subjects specifically relating to Sierra Leone to submit their work.

Thank you so much for visiting The Journal and we hope that you (a) find it both interesting and of use to you and (b) that you will inform colleagues, friends and students of the existence of a Journal dedicated to the study of Sierra Leone.

Our history - brief summary

Sierra Leone Studies is an academic journal about Sierra Leone. It has moved through various forms since the initial publication was launched in 1918.

First series

Between 1918 and 1939 22 issues were published – records of the content of these editions are housed at: <http://unimak.edu.sl/wordpress/centre-of-sierra-leone-studies>

Second series

In 1944 the British Colonial Research Committee established the Colonial Social Science Research Council (CSSRC). In order to provide for the systematic collection and analysis of data concerning the colonies, British academics were sponsored to carry out research in the colonies. In 1953 the CSSRC provided £660 to publish two issues a year of a second series. This ran until 1970 during which time 26 issues were published.

The journal was relaunched in 2012.

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Editor's Note

The Centre of Sierra Leone Studies, University of Makeni, Sierra Leone -
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This has now been established at UNIMAK.

Its opening page begins as follows:

'The country of Sierra Leone has a long and interesting history. It holds a unique place in the development of the continent of Africa. As such it deserves to have an academic institution, based on its own soil that serves as the most informed and respected place of study and source of information available to those wanting to further their knowledge of the country and its people. We hope that, over a period of time, we can develop a centre **of** learning that attracts scholars from across Africa and elsewhere.'

The Editor of JSLS is building the initial data base and has been offered a Visiting Professorship to begin the work of creating an environment where scholars, students and all with an interest in Sierra Leone, can visit and use the facilities to further their own chosen topic of study.

John Birchall – October, 2016

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1926 Slave Revolt in Sierra Leone

By Alfred Arkley

Presented at International Conference, *Sierra Leone Past & Present*, Freetown, Sierra Leone, April 26, 2012

Revised October, 2016

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1. Slavery in Sierra Leone Crown Colony

Slavery is an important part of the history of the Sierra Leone Colony and Protectorate. In 1787, the British established Province of Freedom near present Freetown for London's "Black Poor." Included were African Americans who had gained their freedom after joining with the British Army during the American War of Independence. In 1792, the British established Freetown, which was settled by these former American slaves. They were called Creoles (today named Krios). The liberated Africans from the slave ships were also called Creoles. In those years prior to the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, these settlers from Great Britain, Nova Scotia, and Jamaica struggled to survive. They were resented by the adjacent African and European slave traders. Some of these returned African freed slaves became slave traders themselves in order to survive.¹

After the British abolished the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, Freetown became a Crown Colony. Even though the Atlantic slave trade between the Africans and the New World had been legally abolished, the slave trade continued and increased outside the Crown Colony until slavery was abolished in the USA in 1865. The Sierra Leone African slave traders simply moved away from the Freetown area. From 1825 to 1865, the British Navy liberated 130,000 slaves. The majority landed at Freetown. During that same time, over 1.8 million slaves were landed in the New World.²

The Colony was flooded with liberated slaves from the captured ships. These liberated slaves were apprenticed to various Krio masters. Unfortunately, this led to abuse where many of the so-called liberated slaves became enslaved again.³ In 1847 the apprenticeship system, "so offensively close to slavery"⁴ was abolished.

When slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, slavery was also abolished in Sierra Leone. However, slavery outside the borders of the Crown Colony was not affected. Even when the Protectorate was established in 1896, slavery was still legal in the Protectorate until 1928. Beginning in 1833, slaves of the tribes near the Crown Colony would enter the Crown Colony to become free. In 1841, the British established a legal

¹ Kevin Lowther, *The African American Odyssey of John Kizell – A South Carolina Slave Returns to Fight the Slave Trade in His African Homeland*, S.Carolina U.P., 2008, Chp 6.

² Alfred Arkley, *Slavery in Sierra Leone*, M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1965, pp.3-6.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.7-10.

⁴ Christopher Fyfe, *History of Sierra Leone*, Oxford U.P., 1962, p.251.

principle that they would not return a fugitive slave who had escaped to Freetown.⁵ This legal principle continued until the abolition of slavery in the Sierra Leone Protectorate in 1928.⁶

Although slavery had been abolished in the Sierra Leone Crown Colony, slavery continued with new names. When the apprenticeship system ended, it was replaced by the ward system.⁷ The ward system was where a Krio household in the Colony would adopt a child from outside the Colony to be educated and trained in useful occupations. Some abuse occurred with children being sold to households and mistreated. Slave trade of children to the Colony had developed in the 1850's. British attempts to prosecute the traders and require households to educate their wards were opposed by some of the Krios. They asserted the treatment of wards as not abusive. However, the testimony of the wards reported that they had been sold to some Krios in Freetown.⁸ The Krios in the Crown Colony were descendants of the original settlers from USA, liberated Africans from slave ships, and slaves who had fled from the Protectorate. Exactly which group was accused of ward abuse is unknown. The abuse of the ward system as related to domestic slavery still needs more research.

2. Slavery in Sierra Leone Protectorate

The slave owners in the Sierra Leone Protectorate when explaining their practice of slavery usually described it as domestic slavery. The British did the same. This benign label allowed people to defend domestic slavery as mild and as neither oppressive nor violent. Orlando Patterson points out in his comprehensive review of slavery throughout the world "Slavery is one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master and total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave."⁹ Domestic slavery in Sierra Leone had a power imbalance in the master slave relationship. It varied among the different tribes.

In 1923, it was estimated that 15% of the Protectorate population were in servitude. This was 219,000 people in a population of 1.4 million. The percentage of slaves varied according to tribe, with the Mandingo, Susu, and Vai in the 30% range and the Lokko, Kissi, and Limba in the 5% range.¹⁰ How each tribe treated domestic slaves ranged from mild where there was little power imbalance between master and slave to a harsh situation where the power imbalance was great. The Mandingo slave owners were considered the harshest.¹¹

To the British, domestic slavery was seen as mild. The British attitude could be summed up by the 1906 statement of Mr. Antrobus of the Colonial Office. "The system of slavery is not on the whole harsh towards the so-called slave, but secure for him and his family work and maintenance during his active life, and support and care during old age and

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.129-132.

⁷ Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, pp.10-15.

⁸ British Parliamentary Paper, Cmd.1995 of 1855, "*Papers Relative to the Prevention of Slave Dealing in Sierra Leone.*"

⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death – A Comparative Study*, Harvard U.P., 1982.

¹⁰ British Parliamentary Paper, Cmd.3020 of 1928, "*Correspondence relating to Domestic Slavery in the Sierra Leone Protectorate.*" p.45.

¹¹ Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, Chp.2 and John Grace, *Domestic Slavery in West Africa with Particular Reference to Sierra Leone Protectorate, 1896-1927*, Muller, 1975, pp.161-172.

sickness.”¹² However, by 1924, Governor Slater indicated a change of the British position due to pressure from the League of Nations. “The fact remains that a domestic slave is a slave, and that a bad master has powers over him or her which are repugnant to the principles of British justice.”¹³ John Grace’s study of shifting British policy on domestic slavery is comprehensive.¹⁴

In the post-WWI era, the pressure to abolish domestic slavery in the Protectorate came from outside Sierra Leone. The League of Nations appointed several commissions to suppress slavery in all its forms. It became clear by 1924 that domestic slavery in the Protectorate would not be acceptable to the League. As a result, a gradual abolition ordinance was promulgated in 1926 by the British using Sierra Leone Legislative Council. With the passage of this ordinance, the British were able to report to the League of Nations that domestic slavery was on its way out in Sierra Leone.¹⁵

For the Krios in the Colony, domestic slavery was also seen as mild. The Krio attitude in the Colony was summed up in the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 1922, “(the slaves have) for years have enjoyed the good will of their masters...and if abolition occurred Freetown would be flooded with idlers and do-nothings...loafers and people of doubtful honesty.”¹⁶ The essence of the Krio position was that Protectorate domestic slavery was not an important issue. The important issue was that educated Africans should be given positions of responsibility in the governance of Sierra Leone. Domestic slavery was viewed as less important than British racism toward Krios in the Crown Colony. A British pronouncement on Protectorate slavery in the League of Nations was of little interest in the Colony.¹⁷ The Sierra Leone Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was not concerned with domestic slavery. From 1912 to 1920, the Auxiliary’s main concerns related to British racial discrimination against the Krios. From 1923 to 1928 when the discussions concerning the gradual and total abolition of domestic slavery happened, the Auxiliary was no longer meeting.¹⁸

The Protectorate Paramount Chiefs had no need to defend the idea that domestic slavery was mild because both the British and Krios already supported them. The Hut Tax War of 1898, which they lost, actually was a win as far as domestic slavery was concerned. Since slavery was African custom and law, the British decided they would not immediately challenge nor change it.¹⁹

The general belief among all was that domestic slavery would disappear over time as Sierra Leone became more economically developed. The Krios had proposed compensation for the slaver owners when the gradual abolition of domestic slavery was proposed. Dr. H.C. Bankole-Bright proposed a payment of 200,000 pounds sterling following the precedent when slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833.²⁰ When the vote in the Sierra Leone Legislative Council to include compensation in the Gradual Abolition of Slavery

¹² British Colonial Office, C.O. 270/484, No. 140 May 28, 1908.

¹³ British Parliamentary Paper, Cmd.3020 of 1928, *Op.cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁴ John Grace, *Op.cit.*, Chp.1

¹⁵ Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, pp.84-86, 91-93, 110.

¹⁶ *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, September 1922.

¹⁷ Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, pp.84-86.

¹⁸ Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, pp. 86-90.

¹⁹ Ismail Rashid, “*Do dady nor lef me make dem carry me’: Slave Resistance and Emancipation in Sierra Leone, 1894-1928*”, *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 19:2, 1998, p. 215 and Krijn Peters, *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone*, Cambridge U.P., 2011, pp. 37-38.

²⁰ *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, October 8, 1927, p.27.

Ordinance, none of the three of Paramount Chiefs voted for it. Compensation was raised again by the Krios when the immediate Abolition Ordinance was considered and this proposal was rejected by the British. However, Paramount Chief Bai Comber stated, "the slave owners in the Protectorate will suffer greatly and their wealth will be broken down almost entirely. I am recording this fact so that in the future you may be able to make some sort of recommendation to the big people in England to enable to make some sort of provision for the betterment of the Protectorate."²¹ Regarding the domestic slaves themselves, the history of Sierra Leone contains examples of Protectorate slave resistance. Fleeing to the Colony, actual revolts, disobedience of masters, threat of sale to another master, desire for freedom, and complaints of ill-treatment all give evidence that domestic slavery was neither mild nor pleasant for many slaves.²² Today there are no narratives by emancipated slaves or their descendants. It seems that to admit slavery in one's background is just not done in Sierra Leone.²³

3. 1926 Slave Revolt in the Protectorate

From 1923 to 1926, there was much discussion in Freetown regarding domestic slavery. There were stories in the newspapers about the proceedings in the Sierra Leone Council. The Gradual Abolition Ordinance was passed in 1925. In the Protectorate, rumors began to spread that slavery had been abolished.²⁴ Many of the estimated 219,000 slaves probably were aware of these activities.

Kodogbo Sabu was a Headman of slave village near Karina, Northern Province. His father was Biladi. His tribe is unknown. His owner was Foday Mansaray Dabor of the Mandingo tribe in the Biriwa Chiefdom. Kodogbo Sabu was trusted by his Mandingo masters, "(He) was truthful and we did not hesitate to send him out to transact any of our personal business."²⁵

Kodogbo Sabu had heard a rumor from Freetown that all the Protectorate slaves were free. This rumor spread to all the slave villages in Karina-Nafai area. Sometime in March-April 1926 Kodogbo Sabu went to Batkanu to pay the taxes he collected from his co-slaves. There he met with District Commissioner E.F. Sayers. Sayers told Kodogbo Sabu and other slaves that they were not free but only their children. This information was a, "blow to their hopes (and) roused resentment and discontent."²⁶

Headman Kodogbo Sabu returned to his village and told them what Sayers had said. Soon after the slaves became indifferent farm workers. "All these slaves were not doing any more good work," according to their Mandingo masters. "...they treated all orders and messengers from their...masters with indifference."²⁷ Apparently, during this time the slaves began to plan to do something definite about achieving freedom immediately.

²¹ Sierra Leone Legislative Council Debates, 1926-1927, September 22, 1927 and Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, pp.143-144.

²² Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, pp. 22-30 and Ismail Rashid, *Op.cit.*, entire.

²³ Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, pp. 21-23 and Max Gorvie, *Old and New in Sierra Leone*, Africa's Own Library, Vol.III, No.9, Lutterworth: London, 1944, pp.53-54.

²⁴ Madam Cherinoh Kadaybah, June 24, 1963.

²⁵ Alhaji Alpha Borbor Sheriff, June 22, 1963.

²⁶ Native Affairs Minute Paper, Karene District, Northern Province, Sierra Leone, N.A. 178/1926, Paper No. 21, December 20, 1926.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Sometime in May 1926, Kodogbo Sabu accompanied by other slaves went to Makeni to see District Commissioner J.T. Kemp. N'fa Nonko, a Mandingo chief at Karina followed his slaves. According to the son of N'fa Nonko, "Then the slaves said to the District Commissioner that all the other slaves from other countries (USA and England) are now free and they too required freedom."²⁸ J.T. Kemp told the slaves, "You are not going to be free but your children are not slaves with effect from today's date." Kemp also told the slaves to go, "quiet themselves at home and he did not want to hear anything about fighting."²⁹ The slaves were unsatisfied about Kemp's advice.

Sometime in June 1926, the slaves left the Biriwa Chiefdom and moved to Pampanko, in adjacent Sanda Lokko Chiefdom. They moved to Pampanko because N'fa Nonko had some slave farms there. The slaves, "felt that they could have a stronger force if they joined their friends at Pampanko."³⁰

The revolt of the slaves was a surprise to the Mandingo masters. "They plotted through secret meetings which did not come to our notice,"³¹ according to the son of N'fa Nonko. Many of the other masters deny that the revolt was planned. "the slaves did not plan any revolt. It was a sudden action they took..." Yet all the Mandingo masters agreed that, "the slaves revolted through the incitement of Kodogbo Sabu."³²

Sometime in September 1926, Commissioner for the Northern Province, Captain W.B. Stanley met with the Mandingo Chiefs of the Karene District at Batkanu. Stanley announced the British policy toward runaway slaves. A slave could gain freedom in two ways – either by purchasing his freedom or by running away without any of the master's property. However, the runaway slave must proceed further than the neighboring chiefdom. Otherwise, the master could enter the neighboring chiefdom and get his runaway slaves.³³

The runaway slaves of the Biriwa Mandingoes led by Kodogbo Sabu must have learned of Stanley's runaway slave policy statement. In September 1926, to be safe, some slaves moved to Mapurto in the Sella Limba Chiefdom that was ruled by regent Banja. The rest of the slaves remained at Pampanko.

N'fa Nonko wanted his slaves back. In early November 1926, Northern Commissioner Stanley visited Karina, advising N'fa Nonko, "to go to Kamalu and see Bai Samura and get his permission to collect the slaves in Sanda Lokko and carry them back to Biriwa."³⁴

In early November 1926, N'fa Nonko gathered, "all the Mandingo tribe,"³⁵ and went to Kamalu where Paramount Chief Bai Samura of the Sanda Lokko Chiefdom lived. There is some evidence that N'fa Nonko sent messengers to places outside the immediate area of Karina and Nafai. Nonko spent 10 days in Kamalu while Bai Samura waited for orders from District Commissioner Sayers about what to do with N'fa Nonko. The British report states that Bai Samura never received any instructions from Sayers. Nonko's son Alaji Alpha

²⁸ Alhaji Borbor Nonko, September 15, 1962.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Alhaji Alpha Borbor Sheriff, December 30, 1963.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Madam Cherinoh Kadaybah, June 24, 1963.

³³ Native Affairs Minute Paper, Karene District, Northern Province, Sierra Leone, N.A. 178/1926, Paper No. 21, December 20, 1926.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Alhaji Borbor Nonko, September 15, 1962.

Borbor Sheriff, states that Sayers ordered Bai Samura to surrender the fugitive slaves to N'fa Nonko.³⁶

In November 1926, there were over 300 slaves in Kamalu and they were represented by four Headmen, Kodogbo Sabu who was the spokesman. The other Headmen were Nyama, Fasidi, and Sabuba. Other leaders were Lansaneh, Jiba of Kaworokosonah, Alpha Koroma of Sokuldalah, Momodu Marah of Massah, and Bokari.³⁷

On November 24, 1926, N'fa Nonko told Kodogbo Sabu that, "I have come to collect you to come back to my place." Kodogbo Sabu replied, "We did not revolt, it was the Europeans that set us free, but if you say that we should return we are prepared to return."³⁸ Sabu told Nonko that the slaves at Pampanko were hiding in the bush. Sabu asked Nonko for permission to go ahead to collect the slaves. Sabu left accompanied by five of Nonko's men – Tida Sadiku, Foday Lansana, Momodu Fona, Salla Silla, and Momodu Koroma.³⁹

"Immediately when they arrived, Kodogbo Sabu sounded the horn and the slaves assembled. Sabu said that they should return to slavery, the slaves revolted and almost killed the five people present."⁴⁰ N'fa Nonko's men returned to Kamalu that evening.

On November 25, 1926, N'fa Nonko returned to Pampanko with thirty of his followers to get the slaves. They found the place empty as the slaves had fled to a place near the Sella Limba Lokko boundary. They may have wanted to go to Mapurto in the Sella Limba Chiefdom where they would be safe from their masters according to British policy. The slaves led by Kodogbo Sabu had built a temporary camp at Masobai. It was a one house village, whose Headman was named Koba. The camp was composed of men, women, and children and was located in the Sanda Lokko Chiefdom.

On finding Pampanko deserted, the Mandingoes began to search for the fugitive slaves. The slaves placed an old woman as the guard to the entrance the temporary camp at Masobai.⁴¹ "Yeramen, a slave owner, then found he old woman at the gate and asked her where her companions had gone. Of course, he was trying to trace their course in a secret way. The old lady summoned Yeramen to swear on her white hair to confirm that he was a slave. Yeramen, anxious to know where the slaves were, did so and the lady directed them to their huts. Yeramen led the way and was followed by the others."⁴²

On November 25, 1926, a fight occurred when the slaves and their masters met in Masobai. The Mandingo masters were led by N'fa Nonko and the slaves by Kodogbo Sabu. Nonko claimed that Sabu was encouraged by two Lokkos, sub-chief Bai Bureh and Koba the Headman of Masobai. The slaves were armed with flintlock rifles and cutlasses. The Mandingoes claimed that they were unarmed and only carried ropes to bind the slaves. "We did not know that the slaves were going to fight us, that is why we did not bring any weapons with us." Yet, both Kabindi and Sabu Konte, slaves who fought against N'fa Nonko, claim that their masters were armed with guns and swords. Yet there are no reported casualties on the side of the slaves from gunshot wounds. In addition, when the Regent of Sella Limba Chiefdom, Pa Banaja Moi, disarmed N'fa Nonko's group, only one sword and

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Masobai is also called Makoba.

⁴² Kemoh Sorie, June 26, 1963.

twelve sticks were taken from them. Therefore, it would appear that N'fa Nonko's followers did not carry guns when they entered Kamakwie after the fight at Masobai.⁴³

During the fight Alpha Laiba, a slave, shot Yeramén in the thigh. Laiba was aiming at his master Sala Silla but missed. Kabindi, another slave, shot his gun but he missed. It is not clear what happened next but eventually the thirty Mandingoes, led by N'fa Nonko were able to capture seventy slaves. "All the slaves who were captured after the fight were tied and flogged and taken to Nafai," according to a report by District Commissioner J.T. Kemp. At Nafai, the returned slaves were placed in stocks for several days as punishment. The masters confiscated thirty cutlasses and seven guns.⁴⁴

At this point, the Mandingoes went to Kamakwie in the Sella Limba Chiefdom to search for more of their slaves. Kodogbo Sabu, Alpha Laiba, and the majority of the slaves had escaped. Arriving at Kamakwie on the same day N'fa Nonko demanded twenty-seven of his slaves from the Regent of Sella Limba, Pa Banja Moi, who refused to surrender the slaves. Moi told Nonko to disarm his group. Moi sent a message to Batkanu for advice from District Commissioner Sayers. Sayers ordered N'fa Nonko and his slaves to report to Batkanu. Sayers also praised Regent Moi for, "his action in disarming N'fa Nonko's people and reporting the case promptly to me."⁴⁵ N'fa Nonko claimed he never received the order of Sayers to return so he returned to Karina.⁴⁶

Yeramén whose wound became infected was sent on a hammock to Karina and died on December 3, 1926. Nonko asked A. Lynch, who was doing a topographical survey for the Sierra Leone government, to write a letter for him to Sayers. The letter mentioned the fight and the death of Yeramén.⁴⁷

On December 6, 1926, Assistant District Commissioner E.J. Tyndall sent messengers to Karina requesting the presence of N'fa Nonko, his followers. In addition, his slaves at Batkanu. On December 11, 1926, N'fa Nonko, twenty Mandingoes masters, and twenty-seven slaves reported to Batkanu. A warrant for Alpha Laiba's arrest was issued charging him with the manslaughter of Yeramén. On December 7, 1926, two slaves, Sabu Konte and Kabindi were imprisoned for 14 days with hard labor for the illegal possession of firearms.⁴⁸

On December 20, 1926, Sayers reported to Captain W.B. Stanley that, "all or nearly all of the masters (some twenty-five) are now in Batkanu with N'fa Nonko, and about sixty of the slaves, and there is now no possibility of further physical conflict between the two parties."⁴⁹ On the same day, Kodogbo Sabu was arrested by Tyndall at Kamalu. Tyndall also reported that the Court Messengers were holding Alpha Laiba's wife and they expected and they expected to have Alpha Laiba soon, who was reported to be at Loma.⁵⁰

When N'fa Nonko and his followers arrived at Batkanu, they were arrested and charged with conspiracy and riot. The slaves were held as witnesses. While at Batkanu, the prisoners answered a roll call each morning. The prisoners hired themselves out as farm

⁴³ Alhaji Borbor Nonko, September 1962 and Native Affairs Minute Paper, Karene District, Northern Province, N.A. 178/1926 Paper No. 15/2-3 December 13, 1926.

⁴⁴ Native Affairs Minute Paper, Karene District, Northern Province, N.A. 178/1926, Paper No. 15/2-3 December 13, 1926.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Paper No. 2, November 26, 1926.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Paper No. 21, December 20, 1926.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Paper No. 30, January 16, 1927.

laborers, “in order get chop.” The prisoners remained in Batkanu until sometime in January 1927.⁵¹

On January 16, 1927, five cases were committed to trial in the Circuit Court. Case #1 - N’fa Nonko, Sheku Silla, Numa Kaloko, Momodu Dabu, Alpha Sheriff, Lamina Fona, and Fode Lansana Kaloko, all Mandingo slave owners, were charged with riot and conspiracy. Cases #2 to #4 – Salla Silla, Momodu Daba, and Sheku Silla, all Mandingo slave owners, were charged with assault in separate cases. Case #5 – Alpha Laiba, slave, was charged with manslaughter.⁵²

The cases were heard in Makeni at a special court session from March 24-26, 1927 with William Butler Lloyd as the presiding judge. N’fa Nonko was represented by C.E. Wright, a Krio lawyer who was an appointed member of the Sierra Leone Legislative Council. At the trial Alpha Laiba was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to one year of hard labor. Sheku Silla and Momodu Dabu were both acquitted of the assault charges. Salla Silla was convicted of assault and battery and Wright filed an appeal. All the defendants, except Alpha Laiba, were acquitted of the riot charges. Four were convicted of conspiracy, N’fa Nonko, Sheku Silla, Momodu Dabu, and Fode Lansana Kaloko. Numa Kaloku, Alpha Sheriff, and Lamina Fona were cleared of all charges. Wright filed for appeal of the conspiracy convictions.⁵³

On June 29, 1927, the N’fa Nonko *et al.* and the Salla Silla cases were consolidated as the issues were identical. Did the master of a slave have the right to recapture the slave, if the slave ran away? On July 1, 1927, the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone quashed the convictions of N’fa Nonko *et al.* and Salla Silla in a two to one decision. The essence of the two majority opinions was that Ordinance No. 9 of 1926 (Gradual Abolition) did not abolish slavery. Justice J. Aitken stated that the laws of Sierra Leone, including Ordinance No. 9 of 1926 did not take away the slave owner’s, “right to use reasonable force to re-take” his slave. Since the Circuit Court at Makeni had, “found that none but reasonable force was used,” the masters were acting legally.⁵⁴

In the end, only one person was punished in the British Colonial legal system, the slave, Alpha Laiba. One year of hard labor for the death of the Mandingo slave owner, Yeramén. The seven slave owners were acquitted of the charges of conspiracy and riot. Using African custom and law, which was supported by the British, the slaves were immediately punished, probably after a hearing before a British District Commissioner. N’fa Nonko’s 70 slaves were tied up and returned to Karina. There they were flogged and placed in stocks for several days. Two slaves were sentenced to 14 days of hard labor for possession of a firearm. Kodogbo Sabu was arrested, but there is no record of what happened. In January 1928, he was back in Karina again.⁵⁵

4. Abolition of Slavery in the Protectorate

The reaction in Great Britain to the court decision was of shock and disbelief. No one could understand why slavery was allowed in Sierra Leone, the home of the freed slaves.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Paper No. 18, December 17, 1926.

⁵⁴ British Parliamentary Paper, Cmd. 3020 of 1928, *Op.cit.*, pp.64-66.

⁵⁵ Alhaji Borbor Nonko, September 15, 1962.

The subtle difference between the Protectorate and Colony was lost to the general public. The texts of the judgment were published in the London Times and Manchester Guardian on July 27, 1927. The same day the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Ormsby-Gore sent a telegram to Sierra Leone requesting a copy of the judgment, a copy was sent on August 1, 1927. On July 28, 1927, Mr. Ormsby-Gore answered a question in the House of Commons about the N'fa Nonko case. Ormsby-Gore said, "If there appears to be a fault in the drafting of that Ordinance, an amendment will have to be considered."⁵⁶ On July 29, 1927, the Foreign Office apparently still uninformed about Sierra Leone submitted a report to the League of Nations that made no mention of the new situation. Sir John Simon, a lawyer, stated in the London Times, "it would be indeed lamentable if the chiefs of West Africa were led to believe that they have behind them the support of the highest British authorities for maintaining a system of slave owning. The Colonial Office is doubtless considering what action should be taken, especially as the League of Nations is receiving reports at Geneva next month with a view to the final suppression of the remains of slavery throughout the world."⁵⁷

For the Krios, there was little immediate public reaction to the N'fa Nonko case in Freetown beyond publishing the majority decision on July 16,¹²⁷ and the minority dissent on July 23, 1927. During this period the Sierra Leone Auxiliary of British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was disbanded.⁵⁸ The Society that had been defunct since WWI had never concerned itself with the question of slavery in the Protectorate. Its main purpose was to serve as a vehicle to the British government for Krio grievances. During the Legislative Council discussion of gradual abolition ordinance, the London office had done nothing to support the Krios for compensation for the slave owners. T.H. Thompson wrote a newspaper editorial that summed up the Krio attitudes. He pointed out the Freetown people did not see the question of slavery as important as the question of more African participation on the governing process. No one in Great Britain seemed too concerned about the 1926 Railroad Strike and no one worried about ending of the elected Freetown City Council. Yet the entire world was concerned about slavery.⁵⁹

The British moved quickly to abolish slavery in the Protectorate. On September 15, 1927, Ordinance No. 24 of 1927 was introduced at special session of the Legislative Council. The Ordinance would abolish the legal status of slavery and would commence on January 1, 1928. There would be no compensation. The ordinance was passed on September 22, 1927.⁶⁰

The reaction of many of the Freetown Krios who were observers and/or members of the Legislative Council was to write editorials or letters in the newspapers. They urged for compensation the slave owners and for controls be implemented to prevent the Colony from being overrun with ex-slaves migrating from the Protectorate. Little concern was shown for the welfare of the ex-slaves but much concern was shown the for racial dignity of the Krios.⁶¹

However, in the Sierra Leone Weekly News, Modibo wrote, "I am afraid Krio people in general have treated this matter of slavery too lightly, much too lightly if not with

⁵⁶ Anti-Slavery Reporter, October 1927, p.123.

⁵⁷ London Times, August 27, 1927.

⁵⁸ British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society Archives, July 11, 1927.

⁵⁹ West Africa Mail and Trade Gazette, September 17, 1927.

⁶⁰ Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, pp.138-146.

⁶¹ Sierra Leone Weekly News, September 24 & October 1, 1927.

complete indifference, in the past. While strangers, who cannot in any way suffer by its retention or benefit by its removal, have for years 'pressed parliament' to remove the dread curse from our country, we who are most intimately concerned in the matter have scarcely lifted a finger to bring about the happy result...Talk of Compensation! Well, yes, there ought to be some compensation – not to the masters but to the poor slaves in an act of reparation for all the untold miseries they and their ancestors have endured for generations."⁶² How much support Modibo received from the Krio community is unknown.

On January 1, 1928, the legal status of slavery was abolished in the Protectorate. In Karina where the slave revolt began, Kodogbo Sabu told the slaves that they were now free. "When the slaves heard this they were dancing the whole of the day."⁶³ "Some of the slaves, after they had been set free, lived in groups and founded villages where they could farm for themselves."⁶⁴ Near Nafai the following villages were founded, Panpankoh, Fodesoriah, and Maribaya. Some slaves when becoming free added a second name to their former one, e.g., Laiba is now called Alpha Laiba.⁶⁵ Some slaves moved further away to Kondebaia, Sokudala, and Kaworosokornah." according Alhaji Borbor Nonko, son of N'fa Nonko.⁶⁶ In the Mabole Valley (Bombali District), in the Tambakka Chiefdom (Karene District) and in the Tamiso Chiefdom (Koinadugu District) slaves left their masters. The majority of the masters were Mandingoes.⁶⁷

The abolition of slavery was a disaster to the Mandingo slave owners in the Karina area. There was no one to work the farms because most of the slaves had left or were working for themselves. Around Karina there were over 1,700 slaves, 1016 were owned by N'fa Nonko, one of the largest slave owners in the Protectorate.⁶⁸ At Waridala 268, slaves left and the Fona family reported in 1963 that they "are still suffering."⁶⁹ The British offered N'fa Nonko 200 pounds sterling for his legal expenses. He refused the money.⁷⁰ British sent Nonko's sons to Guinea for agricultural training.⁷¹

In the Northern Province, about 7,000 slaves left their masters. The majority of who had separated themselves from their former masters (after refusing to work for a lengthy period) before the Abolition of Slavery Ordinance was enacted.⁷² According to British reports, abolition had little effect in the Central and Southern Provinces. In the Central Province, "The measure was received without demur – almost apathy throughout the district, and one might now believe that there had never been such an institution."⁷³ In the Southern Province, about 1,000 slaves came to Pujehun, "to ascertain actually from the Government itself, that they were free. Abolition of slavery had little effect anywhere in the

⁶² *Ibid.*, October 8, 1927.

⁶³ Alhaji Borbor Nonko, September 15, 1962.

⁶⁴ Tijan Sheriff, June 16, 1963.

⁶⁵ Foday Swandy Fofana, June 18, 1963.

⁶⁶ Alhaji Borbor Nonko, September 15, 1962.

⁶⁷ British Colonial Office, 270/58, *Annual Report for 1927, Northern Province*, p.4.

⁶⁸ Native Affairs Minute Paper, Karene District, Northern Province, No. 178/1926, Paper No. 17, December 13, 1926.

⁶⁹ Alhaji Mustafa Fofana and Alhaji Suliman Fofana, March 31, 1963. The Fofana family prospered during the diamond boom of the 1950's. In 1963, Waridala had an expensive mosque and clock tower paid for with the diamond profits.

⁷⁰ Alhaji Borbor Nonko, September 15, 1962.

⁷¹ Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, pp.151-152.

⁷² British Colonial Office, 270/58, *Op.cit.*, p.4.

⁷³ British Colonial Office, *Annual Report for 1927 and 1928, Central Province*.

province and offered few problems even to the Native Courts.”⁷⁴ There was little evidence that abolition had any economic effect.

The only group outside Sierra Leone concerned with Protectorate slavery was the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society of Great Britain. The Society never had any knowledge of the problem in Sierra Leone because by the 1920's their Auxiliary in Freetown was not active. The Society did mobilize British public opinion against slavery after the N'fa Nonko case and helped force the Colonial Office into a position of total abolition. The Society was also active in Geneva in working for an International Convention under the sponsorship of the League of Nations. The Society helped the cause of the Protectorate slaves by making their conditions known to the rest of the world. After slavery was abolished in Sierra Leone, the Society kept watch on the British Colonial Office reports to make sure abolition took place.⁷⁵

In 1929, the Society having reviewed the British Colonial Office reports to the League of Nations on Sierra Leone concluded abolition had taken place. They noted that master-slave relationship was now an employer-employee relationship.⁷⁶ The British report stated the gradual steps were being taken to gradually pay for all labor called out on public service. They had decided to remunerate all labor employed in the construction and repair of Government buildings. They hoped to soon to pay wages for road construction in the Protectorate.⁷⁷ In 1933, the British Colonial Office reported to the League of Nations, “that no system of employment had yet to be devised for the free slaves, for they became independent farmers and obtained farms readily...Others sought employment...are paid...on daily rates...but all this will be regulated by the proposed Labor Code.”⁷⁸

In 1932, an Ordinance was passed restricting the chief's right to forced labor. In 1934, a comprehensive Labor Code was enacted. In 1935, the British reported to the League of Nations Advisory Committee on Slavery, “...it appears that there is a tendency on the part of some of the former so-called ‘slaves’ to object to doing communal labor. Moreover, whereas they were formally voiceless in assemblies (and usually absent), after the enactment of the ordinance (abolition) they tended to side against their former masters and to become more vocal.”⁷⁹ In 1938, the forced labor law was strengthened. In 1939, trade unions were allowed to organize in the Colony and Protectorate.⁸⁰ However, in spite of the laws regarding forced labor and unions, “the rights of the Paramount Chiefs to exact forced labor was allowed for a wide variety of communal work...These obligations continued until the Cox Report in 1956. The report recommended that the rights of the Chiefs and Government to forced labor be abrogated because they were partially responsible for the recent riots in Sierra Leone.”⁸¹

⁷⁴ British Colonial Office, *Annual Report for 1927 and 1928, Southern Province*.

⁷⁵ Anti-Slavery Reporter, July 1929, pp.70-71.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ League of Nations, *Official Journal*, December 1928, p.1958.

⁷⁸ Anti-Slavery Reporter, October, 1933, pp.114-115.

⁷⁹ League of Nations, *Slavery (1923-1936)*, Report of the Second Session of the Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery, C.159.M133.1935.VI., p.22.

⁸⁰ Alfred Arkley, *Op.cit.*, p.165.

⁸¹ John Grace, *Op.cit.*, p.237.

5. The Legacies of Slavery in Sierra Leone

One legacy of 1926 Slave Revolt is that it was successful in getting the British to abolish slavery immediately in 1928. It is unknown if Kodogbo Sabu knew that when he led the runaway slaves to leave their Mandingo masters, that this would result in the abolition of Protectorate slavery.

Another legacy, over 7,000 slaves left their masters in the Northern Province and 1,000 slaves in the Southern Province asked if they were free. The story of what happened to the 219,000 emancipated slaves and their descendants is largely unknown.⁸²

Another legacy is that abolition was less successful in changing the economic, political and social structures that supported the exploitation of emancipated slaves. Domestic slavery continued as forced labor. In the 1970's, it was still happening as noted by John Grace.⁸³ It continues today as "woman damage" in Native Courts as described by Esther Mokuna, Maarten Voors, Erwin Bulte, and Paul Richards.⁸⁴

The Civil War, 1991-2002 was related to the collapse of the Sierra Leone government "...intertwined with an accelerated a crisis in rural areas, where the abuse of customary law by ruling land holding elites had particularly severe consequences for young people."⁸⁵ Many participants in the Civil War 1991-2002 were, "children from ex-slave backgrounds...Post-slavery conditions of social dependency and vagrancy reproduced themselves across generations. A rural underclass – ripe for militia recruitment – was born."⁸⁶

Another legacy was a failure to treat the emancipated Protectorate slaves as full members of Sierra Leonean society. In the school history books up to Independence, the condition of the freed Protectorate slaves was largely ignored or briefly covered. For example, Kodogbo Sabu and the slave revolt is unknown.

Another legacy was the invisibility of the emancipated slave. In 1945, it was noted, "The designation of 'slave' carries with it such odium that whether the slave was adopted as a son or given his liberty, the stigma remained"⁸⁷ As a result few would self-identify as having a slave background. No one wrote about his or her personal or family slave experience, as it was just not done. In 1963 in a Native Court, "...if a person calls another a 'slave' he could be fined up to 5 pounds sterling."⁸⁸

All these legacies are related to the existence of global slavery. Kevin Bales has noted that "slavery grows best in extreme poverty...Slaveholders must have the resources to fund the purchase, capture, or enticement of slaves and the power to control them after enslavement...Moreover, the potential slave must lack perceived alternatives to

⁸² Ismail Rashid has begun this research with an unpublished manuscript entitled, *Resisting Domination in West Africa: Enslaved people, Peasants and Chiefs under Colonialism in Sierra Leone, 1890-1960*.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Chp.6.

⁸⁴ Esther Mokuwa, Maarten Voors, Erwin Bulte, & Paul Richards, *Peasant Grievance and Insurgency in Sierra Leone: Judicial Serfdom as a Driver of Conflict*, African Affairs, 1-28, 2011.

⁸⁵ Krijn Peters, *Op.cit.*, p.5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁸⁷ Max Gorvie, *Op.cit.*, pp.53-54

⁸⁸ Amadu Koroma, April 15, 1963. Unfortunately, I contributed to invisibility. When I was interviewing the descendants of the slave owners about the slave revolt, I did not ask to interview the descendants of the emancipated slaves. As a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1962-1963, I was a guest in Sierra Leone. I was sensitive about being a rude guest. Also in jubilant first years of Independence, no one wanted to discuss that Africans had enslaved Africans, more emphasis was upon the enslavement of Africans by Europeans and Americans.

enslavement. Being poor, homeless, a refugee, or abandoned can all lead to the desperation that opens the door to slavery, making it easy for the slaver to lay an attractive trap.⁸⁹ A study of Sierra Leone youth, "affirmed that decades of poor governance, poor economic prospects and violent conflict have produced this generation of young men and women who define their social status primarily in terms of their inability to fulfill their aspirations and their relative exclusion from mainstream economic and political processes."⁹⁰ The possibility of the existence of conditions and capabilities for human exploitation that would lead to what Andrew Crane calls "Modern Slavery As a Management Practice" is probably happening in Sierra Leone.⁹¹ It is time to recognize and document the slave experience before and after abolition in Sierra Leone so that the freed slaves and their descendants are treated with dignity and respect. This can start with **Kodogbo Sabu** and the Slave Revolt of 1926. It needs to continue with elimination or at least amelioration of slave-like conditions of employment that exists in Sierra Leone today. All of these actions would be important in the process of the understanding and healing of a terrible Civil War.

⁸⁹ Kevin Bales, *Disposable People – New Slavery in the Global Economy*, rev.ed., California U.P., 2004, pp.31-33.

⁹⁰ Ismail Rashid, Ibrahim Abdulla, & Joseph Goakai, *Youth Vulnerability and Exclusion, West Africa: Sierra Leone, Country Report*, King's College, London, CSDG Paper, No. 28, April 2009, p.24.

⁹¹ Andrew Crane, *Modern Slavery As a Management Practice: Exploring the Conditions and Capabilities for Human Exploitation*, *Academy of management Review*, Vol.38, No.1, January 2013.

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The Records of the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General of Sierra Leone: A Note on the Preservation of Historical Documents in Sierra Leone

By Nigel Browne-Davies

The importance of preserving archival records in Sierra Leone has been reinforced by recent developments aimed at digitising and preserving documents and artefacts that are pertinent for individuals and scholars who are interested in Sierra Leone.⁹² In recent years, there have been considerable efforts to preserve aspects of the rich heritage of Sierra Leone, dating from the precolonial era to the present period of post-independence.⁹³ Hundreds of colonial-era documents held at the Sierra Leone Public Archives at Fourah Bay College were preserved as a result of grants from the British Library Endangered Archive Programme.⁹⁴ Furthermore, there are projects currently underway to digitise further documents in the Sierra Leone Public Archives and other scholars have focused on preserving the historical records pertaining to the Sierra Leone Railway.⁹⁵ However, although there have been efforts to digitise and preserve archival records held in the Sierra Leone Public Archives, there have been few, if any, attempts to digitise and preserve the valuable records of the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

It is the aim of this article to briefly summarise the current and past initiatives to digitise and preserve archival records in Sierra Leone and to briefly outline some of the records held in the Births and Deaths Office and in the Office of the Registrar-General and

⁹²EAP443: Nineteenth century documents of the Sierra Leone Public Archives', *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP443;r=41. 'EAP782: Preserving nineteenth-century records in the Sierra Leone Public Archives,' *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP782;r=3788. Although there are important records relating to Sierra Leone held at archives in Britain such as the British Library and The National Archives of the United Kingdom, the Sierra Leone Public Archives, Births and Deaths Office of Sierra Leone, and the Office of the Registrar-General of Sierra Leone hold a wealth of archival material for academics interested in the study of Sierra Leone.

⁹³EAP284: Before the war, after the war: preserving history in Sierra Leone', *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP284;r=41. 'EAP443: Nineteenth century documents of the Sierra Leone Public Archives', *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP443;r=41.

⁹⁴EAP284: Before the war, after the war: preserving history in Sierra Leone', *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP284;r=41. 'EAP443: Nineteenth century documents of the Sierra Leone Public Archives', *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP443;r=41.

⁹⁵EAP782: Preserving nineteenth-century records in the Sierra Leone Public Archives,' *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP782;r=3788.

the importance of digitising and physically preserving the records held at the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General.

The British Library Endangered Archives Programmes

The British Library Endangered Archives Programme is an initiative launched by the British Library with the aim of preserving endangered archival material in various archives across the world.⁹⁶ The British Library Endangered Archives Programme has provided grants to scholars interested in the preservation of endangered archival records held in Sierra Leone. The EAP284, EAP443, EAP626, and the EAP782 are the four projects launched through the British Library Endangered Archives Programme to preserve archival material held in Sierra Leone.⁹⁷

EAP284, the pilot project to preserve documents held in the Sierra Leone Public Archives, was launched in 2009 in order to determine the extent of damage to archival records in the Sierra Leone Public Archives and to digitise a sample of the records in the Archives.⁹⁸ Following the completion of the initial EAP284 Programme, the EAP443 Project was launched in 2011 and the conclusion of this project in 2013 resulted in the preservation and digitisation of several records held at the Sierra Leone Public Archives.⁹⁹ The records held at the Sierra Leone Public Archives that were digitised through the EAP443 Project include the birth and death records dating between 1858-1891, Liberated African registers, and the registers of 'alien' children brought to the Colony of Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, EAP782 is another two-year project, launched in 2015, that is funded by the British Library Endangered Archives Programme with the aim of continuing the efforts achieved through the EAP284 pilot project and the EAP443 Project to digitise vulnerable records in the Sierra Leone Public Archives.¹⁰¹ It is the aim of the EAP782 Project to digitise census records, school records, and other court records held in the Sierra Leone Public Archives.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ 'Endangered Archives Programme: About Us,' *British Library Endangered Archives*, URL: <http://eap.bl.uk/pages/about.html>.

⁹⁷'EAP284: Before the war, after the war: preserving history in Sierra Leone,' *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP284;r=41.'EAP443: Nineteenth century documents of the Sierra Leone Public Archives,' *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP443;r=41

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⁹⁹'EAP443: Nineteenth century documents of the Sierra Leone Public Archives,' *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP443;r=41

¹⁰⁰'EAP443: Nineteenth century documents of the Sierra Leone Public Archives,' *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP443;r=41

¹⁰¹'EAP782: Preserving nineteenth-century records in the Sierra Leone Public Archives,' *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP782;r=3788. The EAP782 Project is a continuation of the effort to digitise records held in the Sierra Leone Public Archives initiated through the EAP284 and EAP443. The British Library Endangered Archives Programme's funding of EAP782 to preserve and digitise documents in the Sierra Leone Public Archives is reflective of the general fragility of these documents.

¹⁰²'EAP782: Preserving nineteenth-century records in the Sierra Leone Public Archives,' *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP782;r=3788

In addition to the projects aimed at preserving records held in the Sierra Leone Public Archive, there has also been a separate EAP626 Project aimed at preserving the archival records of the Sierra Leone Government Railway which was launched in 2013.¹⁰³ This project has garnered significant attention in the British and Sierra Leonean press.¹⁰⁴

The digitisation of records in the Sierra Leone Public Archives has enhanced opportunities for scholarly research on Sierra Leone and access to archival material held in Sierra Leone.¹⁰⁵ The digitisation of records in the Sierra Leone Public Archives has also partly contributed to an increase in the number of online repositories and databases that provide information that is pertinent for scholars of Sierra Leone¹⁰⁶ Online repositories such as the *Liberated Africans* database provide vital information for scholars interested in researching the history and heritage of the Liberated Africans and their descendants in Sierra Leone, Brazil, and Cuba.¹⁰⁷ The extant records of the Liberated African Department have provided scholars with the data to analyse the ethnicity, age and physical description of the Liberated Africans who were freed and released in Sierra Leone.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the digitisation of records

¹⁰³EAP626: Tracking the past - the preservation of the railway archives of Sierra Leone,' *British Library Endangered Archives Programme*, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP626;r=41. The Sierra Leone Railway Museum has used social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook to create awareness of the aims of the Museum. The Sierra Leone Railway Museum has also been instrumental in the creation of Wikipedia pages such as 'Sierra Leone Railway Museum,' 'Sierra Leone Government Railway,' and 'Rail transport in Sierra Leone.'

¹⁰⁴'Sierra Leone News: Britain gives... Le300m for National Railway Museum,' *Awoko*, 12 November, 2013, URL: <http://awoko.org/2013/11/12/sierra-leone-news-britain-gives-le300m-for-national-railway-museum/>. 'Tram enthusiast tracks down piece of Sierra Leone rail history - 3,000 miles from home,' *Manchester Evening News*, 2 June, 2014, URL: <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/african-tram-enthusiast-finds-sierra-7201175>. 'The Leeds engine that founded a railway in Sierra Leone,' *BBC News*, 24 May, 2015, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-32857318>.

¹⁰⁵'Sierra Leone Past and Present International Conference 2012,' *Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples*, URL: http://www.tubmaninstitute.ca/events/sierra_leone_past_and_present_international_conference_2012.

Schwarz, Suzanne, 'Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century,' *History in Africa*, Volume 39, January 2012, pp. 175-207. 'Sierra Leone Public Archives Collection,' *Harriet Tubman Resource Centre Digital Archives*, URL: <http://digital.tubmaninstitute.ca/collections/show/8>. For example, the Harriet Tubman Resource Centre Digital Archives, organised by Professor Paul Lovejoy of York University contains a digital collection of documents held at the Sierra Leone Public Archives. In 2012, Professors Paul Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwarz organised a history conference entitled, 'Sierra Leone Past and Present' and Professor Schwarz published an article on reconstructing the lives of Liberated Africans that utilised sources held at the Sierra Leone Public Archives. In December 2015, Professors Lovejoy and Schwarz edited and published a volume on Sierra Leone entitled, *Slavery, Abolition and the Transition to Colonisation in Sierra Leone*, (United States: Africa World Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁶'Sierra Leone Public Archives Collection,' *Harriet Tubman Resource Centre Digital Archives*, URL: <http://digital.tubmaninstitute.ca/collections/show/8>. 'About the Project: Overview,' *Liberated Africans*, <http://www.liberatedafricans.org/>. There are other repositories that provide information relating to Sierra Leone that are unconnected with the digitisation of records held in Sierra Leone such as the <http://www.blackloyalist.info/> and <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/index.htm>.

¹⁰⁷'About the Project: Overview,' *Liberated Africans*, <http://www.liberatedafricans.org/>.

¹⁰⁸'The British Vice Admiralty Court: Demography,' *Liberated Africans*, URL: <http://www.liberatedafricans.org/freetown/bvac/bvac.html>. 'The Sierra Leone Mixed Commission: Demography,' *Liberated Africans*, URL: <http://www.liberatedafricans.org/freetown/slmc/slmc.html>. Schwarz, Suzanne, 'Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century,' *History in Africa*, Volume 39, January 2012, pp. 175-207.

held in the Sierra Leone Public Archives has yielded dividends for scholars of Sierra Leone and the transatlantic slave trade.¹⁰⁹

Thus, although there are important archival collections in Sierra Leone that remain endangered, considerable progress in the physical preservation and digitisation of documents has occurred. The reorganisation of the Monuments and Relics Commission is a further indication that the preservation of the national heritage of Sierra Leone has increasingly gained some traction beyond the academic sphere.¹¹⁰ The revitalised Monuments and Relics Commission may have an important role in the preservation of archival material in Sierra Leone.¹¹¹

Records of the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General

However, although the records of the Sierra Leone Public Archives have been preserved and are in the process of further digitisation, as of March 2016, there have been few, if any, efforts to digitise the wealth of archival material presently held in the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General of Sierra Leone.¹¹² Although the records in the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General are important for the national heritage of Sierra Leone and for scholarly research, these records have been largely overlooked in initiatives to preserve historical documents in Sierra Leone. However, similar to the records held in the Sierra Leone Public Archives, further delay in digitising and preserving these documents may result in the deterioration and complete loss of these documents for future generations of Sierra Leoneans and scholars of Sierra Leone.¹¹³

Among the valuable historical documents held at the Office of the Registrar-General at Walpole Street are probate records dating from the 1850s, marriage registers dating from

¹⁰⁹'About the Project: Overview,' *Liberated Africans*, <http://www.liberatedafricans.org/>. For more information on the Liberated Africans Project by Professors Paul Lovejoy and Suzanne Schwartz, see the *Liberated African* Website at <http://www.liberatedafricans.org/index.html>.

¹¹⁰'History: Background,' *The Monuments & Relics Commission*, URL: <https://mrcls.wordpress.com/about-us/history/>. 'National monuments,' *Sierra Leone Heritage*, URL: <http://www.sierraleoneheritage.org/sites/monuments/>. 'Sites and monuments,' *Sierra Leone Heritage*, URL: <http://www.sierraleoneheritage.org/sites/>. Following the passage of the Monuments and Relics Act 1947, the Monuments and Relics Commission had an important role in the declaration of eighteen national monuments in Sierra Leone. However, since the formation of the Monuments and Relics Commission and the declaration of eighteen national monuments, there have been few initiatives to preserve the history and heritage of Sierra Leone until 2014.

¹¹¹As of 14 March, 2016, the website for the Monuments and Relics Commission of Sierra Leone is <https://mrcls.wordpress.com/>. The important role of the Monuments and Relics Commission of Sierra Leone has been re-established and is reflected in the opening of new offices and the launching of a website for the Commission.

¹¹²Kuczynski, Robert René, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire: West Africa*, Volume 1, (Britain: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 208-213. Kemp, Thomas Jay, *International Vital Records Handbook*, (Fifth Edition), (Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2009), p. 556. Births and deaths in the Colony of Sierra Leone were originally recorded at the Office of the Registrar-General but in the early twentieth century, a separate Births and Deaths Office was established as a department of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation. At present, the Births and Deaths Office at Wilberforce Street contains the birth and death records dating from 1892 and the Office of the Registrar-General contains records similarly dating from the colonial era such as marriage registers, land records, and probate records, including wills dating from the 1850s and 1860s.

¹¹³'Births & Deaths records in bad condition', *Awoko*, 6 July, 2009, URL: <http://awoko.org/2009/07/06/births-deaths-records-in-badcondition/>.

the 1820s, and land records similarly dating from as early as 1825.¹¹⁴ These records are valuable for historians seeking to reconstruct and document the colonial period in the Sierra Leonean historical narrative and are also important for genealogical purposes as the documents can be used to trace ancestors dating from the colonial era.¹¹⁵ The birth and death registers held at the Births and Deaths Office of Sierra Leone at Wilberforce Street date from 1892, as the birth and death registers dating from 1858-1891 are held at the Sierra Leone Public Archives.¹¹⁶ The unique value of the records held at the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General for historical and genealogical research cannot be understated and has been corroborated by non-Sierra Leonean genealogists and historians.¹¹⁷

Some of the most important scholarly publications on Sierra Leone that were produced in the twentieth century utilised the documents held in the Office of the Registrar-General of Sierra Leone.¹¹⁸ The late Christopher Fyfe consulted several sources held at the Office of the Registrar-General for his publications including for his seminal work, *A History of Sierra Leone*.¹¹⁹ James St. George Walker examined the land and probate records held at the Office of the Registrar-General of Sierra Leone for his ground-breaking study on the Nova Scotian Settlers.¹²⁰ Some of the research conducted by these scholars would not have been possible without consulting the sources held at the Office of the Registrar-General of Sierra Leone.¹²¹

The importance of digitising and preserving archival material held in the Birth and Death Office is reflected in an article that appeared in the local Sierra Leonean press.¹²² An article published in the *Awoko* newspaper in 2009 highlighted the precarious nature of birth and death records held at the Births and Deaths Office.¹²³ According to the article in the

¹¹⁴Beard, Timothy Field, Demong, Denise, *How to Find Your Family Roots*, (United States: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977), p. 607. Fyfe, p. 102.

¹¹⁵Browne-Davies, Nigel, A précis of sources relating to genealogical research on the Sierra Leone Krio people,' *Journal of Sierra Leone Studies*, Volume 3, Edition 1, (2014), pp. 101-2, 124-126.

¹¹⁶Kemp, Thomas Jay, *International Vital Records Handbook*, (Fifth Edition), (Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2009), p. 556. The birth registers in the Sierra Leone Public Archives generally date from 1858-1891 with the exception of the birth registers for the First Eastern District which ended in 1894.

¹¹⁷Beard, Timothy Field, Demong, Denise, *How to Find Your Family Roots*, (United States: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977), p. 607. Timothy Beard and Denise Demong stated that birth and marriage certificates could be obtained from the Office of the Registrar-General in Freetown.

¹¹⁸Fyfe, Christopher, *A History of Sierra Leone*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 623. Walker, James St. George, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783- 1870*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 419.

¹¹⁹Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 623. Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 419. The late Professor Christopher Fyfe utilised sources held at the Office of the Registrar-General for scholarly publications such as an article on the Baptist Church in Sierra Leone, a monumental history of Sierra Leone and for a biography of Africanus Horton. The sources that Fyfe consulted at the Office of the Registrar-General include the Wesleyan Marriage Register (1843-49), the St. George's Cathedral Marriage Register, and the 'Chronological List of Events affecting the West Coast of Africa'.

¹²⁰Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, p. 419.

¹²¹Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, p. 623. Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, p. 419.

¹²²'Births & Deaths records in bad condition', *Awoko*, 6 July, 2009, URL: <http://awoko.org/2009/07/06/births-deaths-records-in-badcondition/>. The state of colonial-era documents held in the Office of the Registrar-General is presently unknown, although because there has been no effort to preserve these documents, these records are probably endangered or vulnerable.

¹²³'Births & Deaths records in bad condition', *Awoko*, 6 July, 2009, URL: <http://awoko.org/2009/07/06/births-deaths-records-in-badcondition/>

Awoko newspaper, the birth and death records dating from the colonial era were in a state of deterioration due to the inadequate conditions of the Births and Deaths Office. The deterioration of these records would significantly damage the value of the archival material held in the Sierra Leone Public Archives and would render certain aspects of research on Sierra Leone as arduous, if not impossible. The deterioration of the documents held at the Births and Deaths Office of Sierra Leone would also preclude further scholarly publications on Sierra Leone and would be an irreversible loss for posterity.

Conclusion

Since the late 2000s there has been a considerable increase in concerted efforts to preserve historical documents in the Sierra Leone Public Archives.¹²⁴ These efforts at preserving archival material in Sierra Leone have culminated in the salvage of several volumes of colonial documents.¹²⁵ However, the importance of archival material held at the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General of Sierra Leone and the fragility of these documents is reflective of the necessity for the records of the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General to be preserved. The records held at these archives, and in particular at the Births and Deaths Office, would certainly be classified as endangered and vulnerable documents. It is hoped that greater attention will be given to the extant records held at the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General and that initiatives will be launched to ensure the preservation of these documents as part of the national heritage of Sierra Leone and for the benefit of posterity.¹²⁶

¹²⁴EAP284: Before the war, after the war: preserving history in Sierra Leone', British Library Endangered Archives Programme, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP284;r=41. 'EAP443: Nineteenth century documents of the Sierra Leone Public Archives', British Library Endangered Archives Programme, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP443;r=41

¹²⁵EAP284: Before the war, after the war: preserving history in Sierra Leone', British Library Endangered Archives Programme, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP284;r=41. 'EAP443: Nineteenth century documents of the Sierra Leone Public Archives', British Library Endangered Archives Programme, URL: http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP443;r=41.

¹²⁶A survey should be conducted of the records held at the Births and Deaths Office and the Office of the Registrar-General that date from the colonial era to 1961. These records should include wills and other probate records, birth and death records, marriage records, land records, and other court records. After the survey is completed and the records are physically preserved, efforts should be taken to ensure that these valuable documents are digitised.

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**From the Journal of Sierra Leone Studies Archives:
Sierra Leone Studies (New Series), Number. 4, June 1955**

The Administration in 1885

By C.H. Fyfe



1 ADMINISTRATOR PINKETT AND OFFICIALS, 1ST FEBRUARY, 1885

This photograph of what would to-day be called the "Senior Service" was taken seventy years ago in February, 1885. Governor Sir Samuel Rowe was expected shortly from England, and it may be that the Chief Justice, enthroned in the middle of the group in the basket chair, wanted to immortalize the last days of his acting-governorship. This copy survives in an album in the Colonial Office Library (Sierra Leone, Vol. II), and is reproduced here through the kind co-operation of the Librarian.

Standing on the extreme left is Melvin Stuart, who was appointed to the Gold Coast Customs from his home in the Bahamas in 1875, and became Head of the Sierra Leone Customs in 1878. Chief Mannah-Kpaka in *Sierra Leone Studies (New Series)*, No. 1, recalls how popular he was with his subordinates : even in this photograph his geniality is apparent. He retired in 1891, and died in the following year. His family came with him from

Bahamas, and his sons married in Freetown, where some of his descendants are to-day distinguished members of the community.

Next to him is Capt. J.N. Compton, a retired naval lieutenant, who from 1880 to 1899 commanded the countess of Derby, the Colonial steamer, kept up for official journeys along the coast. Slightly behind him stands Robert Wade, a retired Irish N.C.O., Keeper of Freetown gaol from 1882-1891.

In front of him, elegant in white waistcoat, flowered buttonhole, and side whiskers, stands Dr. Robert Smith, Assistant Colonial Surgeon from 1866-1885. Born in Freetown, the son of the Registrar of the Mixed Court, he was educated in England and qualified there as a doctor in 1866, one of the first of many members of that family to enter the medical profession. Robust though he appears, he died suddenly only five months after this photograph was taken.

The distinguished- looking white haired figure beside him is T.G. Lawson, the Government Interpreter (for whom see J.D. Hargreaves, "The Evolution of the Native Affairs Department," *Sierra Leone Studies* (New Series), iii). Behind him is the Rev. John Campbell. He was among the first six pastors to be ordained in the Colony, in 1856, and was appointed in 1858 Assistant Colonial Chaplain. He retired in 1886, aged 63, but lived to enjoy his pension for nearly twenty years.

The conspicuous stoutness of the bearded C.H. Moseley, wearing the sun-helmet, annoyed Governor Rowe. "He has become as round as an orange," he wrote disapprovingly, soon after this photograph was taken. From Assistant Colonial Secretary, Moseley became Commandant, Sherbro (as the District Commissioner, Bonthe, was then called), and retired, as Colonial Secretary, Lagos in 1905. Standing beside him is J.H. Spaine, one of several sons of a farmer at Hastings who distinguished themselves in church and government service. Educated at the Grammar School, he was promoted in 1882 from a clerkship in the Secretariat to be Colonial Postmaster. About the time this photograph was taken he was building himself a fine house in Gloucester Street (later owned by the Hon. J.J. Thomas).

The tall bearded figure towering above the rest is Daniel Carrol. One of the first pupils, and for six years a tutor, at the Grammar School, he entered the legal service in 1857 as clerk to the Master of the Court, worked his way up, and was appointed Master and Registrar in 1882. Though not called to the English Bar, he practised in the local courts. In 1890 his health began to fail, and he retired on pension ; he died in 1908. Below him, beneath a large hat, stands John Meheux. Born about 1815 on the Banana Islands, of a French father and a Temne mother, he was at school in Freetown, held various government posts, and from 1855 until his death in 1886, was Sheriff of the Colony. He was a man of great charm and influence ; a street, at right angles to Kissy Street, where he owned property, perpetuates his name. The family is still represented in Freetown.

Behind and beyond Meheux, in uniform, is Alfred Revington, Acting Inspector-General of Police, an office combined with that of Sanitary Inspector. He was pensioned in 1889, after nine years in the Colony. T.R. Pakenham stands below him, an Assistant Colonial Secretary, in charge of the Aborigines Branch. He died on his way back to England a few months after the photograph was taken, after serving only just over a year in Sierra Leone.

Beyond him rises the turban of Mohammed Sanussi, who from 1872 until 1901 held the post of Arabic Interpreter and writer. Born in the Colony, of Aku parents, he was educated in Futa Jallon, and on his return attracted the attention of Dr Blyden, who was probably responsible for his appointment.

Next is the thickly bearded R.E. Pownall, engaged as Colonial Surveyor from 1883-6. When his contract expired the Colony's finances were so low that the post could not be filled for another eight years.

Standing on the extreme right is J.C. Gore, a Commissariat Officer seconded as Auditor-General from 1882-7. He later transferred to Colonial service [sic], was Colonial Secretary from 1894 to 1901, and then served in Cyprus. He died in 1926.

Sitting on the chair to the left is T. Riseley-Griffith, who, after working in a London bank, and as a government auditor in the West Indies, became in 1879 Colonial Secretary and Treasurer, the posts being combined for economy during his term of office. He was promoted in 1889 to administer the far-off Seychelles.

In the middle sits Francis F. Pinkett. An English barrister, he was appointed Crown Solicitor in 1880, was promoted Chief Justice in 1882, and acted three times as governor. Beneath his judicial calm lurked warlike ambitions : in 1883, he led a punitive expedition up the Kittam. He died in Freetown in May, 1887.

To his right sits J.K. Donaldson, a Scottish lawyer, appointed Queen's Advocate in 1884. His appearance reveals the pleasant, easy-going character that made him popular in Freetown. He was invalided in 1889, and went home to Scotland. Cross-legged on the ground to the left, E.J. Cameron was the only man in the service to have been educated, as became later so usual, at an English public school and university. Appointed Assistant Colonial Secretary in 1884, he was promoted within two years to the West Indies, and served there until 1914, when he returned to West Africa to govern the Gambia. He retired as Sir Edward Cameron in 1920, and died in 1947. On the ground to the right sits Edwin Adolphus, appointed Police Magistrate in 1879, after serving twenty years in British Honduras ; he retired in 1890, left the Colony, and died in 1917. A gentle, hard-working man, his humble position in the photograph is perhaps typical of his life.

Several professional photographers were working in Freetown at this time-Nicholas May (whose brother was headmaster of the Wesleyan Boys' High School), A. St. John, who also worked in the Gambia, J. Nutwoode Hamilton, and others-but the photograph may just as well have been taken by an amateur.

Book Review

From Freeborn to Freetown and Back – Patrick. R O’Leary – Peace Corps Writers, ISBN 978-1-935925-78-1

The first generation of young people to travel far beyond their homeland as CUSO’s, Peace Corps and VSO’s is now beginning to reflect on their time in Sierra Leone. For some, this takes them back to the very early days of the country being an independent State, whilst for others the decade of the 1970’s was when they first cast eyes upon the then somewhat smaller Lungi Airport.

All were ‘children of the 60’s’, The Beatles, summers of love, anti-Vietnam marches and a thorough re-appraisal of what their parents had told them and in some cases fought a war to protect. For many, including me, they were the first of their family to enter higher education and to look through eyes that were not as focused on work, marriage and children as previous generations had been.

Patrick arrived in Freetown having originally been assigned to Tanzania but a change of policy in that newly independent country meant he was re-assigned to Sierra Leone. His posting was to Binkolo, close to Makeni and populated by Limba speaking people. His work focused on making contact with local farmers and telling them of new seeds and other advantages to which he had access – part of a United Nations project. He became both popular and well-known amongst the farmers of the area, so much so, that he promised almost the entire allocation of seeds for the country to those living within a few miles of Binkolo. Not for the last time he had to appreciate the complexities of both life in Sierra Leone and the diplomatic skills needed to navigate through this. His house had a tin roof and an outside toilet and shower. Electricity was yet to reach the village and most people went about their daily lives oblivious of events beyond their own family and neighbours. Patrick listened to the BBC World Service and any other English-Language broadcasts his somewhat ‘basic’ radio could tune in to. The school did have a primary school, sponsored by American Methodists and populated mainly by boys.

His life was also influenced by the local paramount Chief – PC Alimamy Dura II, who took him on travels around the country, to Freetown and frequently to Makeni. They remained friends till Alimamy’s death in 2004, when Patrick re-visited Sierra Leone as one of a group of Peace Corps volunteers paying a visit to what was once ‘home’. The destruction he found saddened him greatly and doubtless reduced some of his memories to levels he had never expected to experience.

Though not an ‘academic’ text, it is a short but informative account of life in northern Sierra Leone in the years immediately after independence. He was in Binkolo during the coups that arose as the 1960’s drew to their close. He noted the origins of what was to follow and watched from afar as the teething troubles of an infant country ended in civil war and all that imposed on the innocent population. He is one of the first of his generation to reflect on what life-changing lessons his time in Sierra Leone taught him and details of his text are now part of the data base of The Centre of Sierra Leone Studies, University of Makeni.

Let’s hope that others who spent some of their formative years in Sierra Leone also write of these. Their accounts are part of the contemporary social history of Sierra Leone.

John

Contemporary Interview

<http://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/publications/lara-taylor-pearce-transparency-accountability-public-financial-management/>

The above was published by: Africa Research Institute, London. It is an interview with Lara Taylor Pearce, Auditor General, Sierra Leone.

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