Some Aspects of Library Development in Ghana, 1750–1964

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Introduction

The history of library development in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) has been over-shadowed by the provision of public library services. Other library facilities which had existed before the creation of public libraries in the country have been largely ignored by many writers of Ghana’s library history. Other propitious circumstances and conditions which were also favourable to library development have not been given sufficient emphasis in the history of public libraries. These include: (1) the introduction of formal education in the Gold Coast; (2) the impact of missionary activities on the community (which included bringing literacy to the people, and the setting up of presses to ensure the speedy publication of reading materials to sustain literacy); (3) the proliferation of literary societies and improvement clubs in the latter part of the nineteenth century (which provided library facilities of some sort for members); (4) the awareness of the need for further education and the growing desire for additional knowledge as manifested in the activities of the literary societies; (5) the provision of training facilities for library personnel in the country; and (6) support from various governments.

This state of affairs has been largely due to the fact that the coming of the Gold Coast Library Board and the services it provided have been rather exhaustively documented in the professional literature, notably by Evans, Middlemost and others to the exclusion of the above factors. The history of library development in the Gold Coast has thus been inextricably associated with the provision of public library services. These other favourable factors must however be stressed in order to put them in their proper perspectives, and to pinpoint their respective roles in the development of library services in the country generally.

This paper seeks to highlight some of these favourable factors which created congenial atmosphere for the provision of library services in the

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country, and the impact these had on the overall development of library services in the Gold Coast. The role of various institutions and individuals associated with these developments would also be reviewed.

**Government Departmental Libraries**

It is evident that the earliest libraries in the Gold Coast were special libraries set up in government departments, notably the Education Department Library, the Library of the Secretary for Native Affairs and the Library of the Department of Agriculture. The latter is believed to have been set up between 1890 and 1897. Others include the Supreme Court Library (1876), Medical Research Institute and Laboratory Services Library (1908), Land Department Library (1925), Geological Survey Department Library (1946) and the Economics Library of the Central Bureau of Statistics (1946).

**Achimota College Library**

The Achimota College Library was conceived as a Teachers’ Training College Library, but in the 1930s it has made such great impact on existing educational institutions and the reading public that it was providing postal library service to educated rural dwellers, mainly teachers. It was later to surrender parts of its holdings to form nucleus collections for other libraries in higher educational institutions in the country.

**Castle School Library**

Debrunner (1967) observed that in 1800 the Reverend Jacob Ulrich Hansen Grundtvig, chaplain of the Danish Castle at Christianborgh, Osu, and teacher of the Castle School for mulatto children, established a small lending library for his pupils.¹

**Early Public Library**

Towards the close of the 1930s a small public library was established in Accra, through the personal efforts of Dr. John Orfeur Aglionby, the Anglican Bishop of Accra, who realising the need of many people for books, had made available his personal library to his parishioners. Although this was later converted to a lending library of some 6,000 books on the grounds of the Holy Trinity Church, it should be stressed that it was a general collection of non-fiction books on various disciplines donated by church members in England, and was available to anyone who wished to make use of it for self
improvement and general advancement. A deposit of a suitable sum, plus a small fee towards the cost of maintenance were to be paid by users of the facilities. But the stock of the library was depleted by the end of 1934 partly as a result of pilfering on the part of users and partly because there was no arrangement to replenish the stock.

Given the commitment exhibited by the churches to sustain interest in literacy and books, it is by no means a sheer coincidence that the first individual to formally moot the idea of providing a library for general public use in the Gold Coast should be none other than the Right Reverend John Orfeur Aglionby, the Anglican Bishop of Accra. The appeal which he made in the Accra Diocesan Association journal, the *Golden Shore* during his leave in England in Autumn 1928, was couched in a determined language, “on my return to the Gold Coast in December, I intend to start a lending library for the natives...”.

**Carnegie Corporation**

In 1939 the Carnegie Corporation of New York appointed a two-man committee to report on the development and expansion of library facilities in West Africa. As a result of the findings of the Committee the Corporation made a grant of £6,250 to be spread over a three-year period for the development of a public library and a mobile library service; and to build an Accra Town Library with a branch to serve the patients and staff of the Korle-Bu Hospital. Part of the sum was also to be given to the Education Department of the Gold Coast to strengthen libraries in teacher training colleges and secondary schools. However in September 1942, the Carnegie Corporation decided that owing to war conditions no further grants would be given for work on library development.

**British Council**

It is noteworthy that it was at this point that the British Council decided to open its offices in the British West African colonies, and took over the plans of the Carnegie Corporation. In May 1943, the British Council decided to assist in the development of library work in the Gold Coast as well as the training of librarians from the Gold Coast and other English-speaking West African countries. The story of the British Council and the development of public library service in the Gold Coast has been told by Evans (1964) in her book as well as in numerous journal articles, and readers are advised to refer to those listed in the bibliography.

For our purpose it is sufficient to note that a British Council Library and a
reading room were opened in Accra in 1945, and this was later to provide a nationwide network of public library service. The Aglionby Library formed the nucleus of the public library service in Accra, and this became the headquarters of the national public library system in Ghana.

These favourable factors must be stressed because at that time of colonial rule there was a lack of interest at the official level in taking decisions which favoured the natives. These factors served as a leverage for the creation of a public library service in Accra, and in the Gold Coast as a whole in the mid-1940s.

Introduction of Formal Education

The earliest contact of the Gold Coast with Western education was found in the fort schools run by the European trading nations. Few of these schools achieved permanence as they were dependent on the personal interests of the Governor, officials and merchants of the day. However, Debrunner (1962) has pointed out the pioneering role played by Danish chaplains, who were not missionaries in bringing education to the Gold Coast. 5

Educational aspects of Missionary Work

During the nineteenth century education began to expand mainly due to missionary efforts. It must be emphasised, however, that the original inspiration for missionary work in the Gold Coast was the desire to make converts. But the missionaries also considered education as an important weapon for the teaching and spreading of the Christian religion. Because both missionary and trading activities were centred in the southern parts of the country, more schools were established along the coast and further inland where the people were more receptive to the Christian faith and the climatic conditions were also conducive to the settling of the white missionaries.

Establishment of Regular Schools

The English Church Mission opened a school in Cape Coast in 1751. The Basel (now Presbyterian) Mission also set up a station at Akropong-Akwamim where they opened schools. They established the first teacher training college in the country in 1848 at Akropong to train teachers in order to improve the quality of teaching. The other churches, mainly the Catholic, the Wesleyan (now Methodist), the Scottish and the Bremen Missions set up a few grammar schools along the coast.

Of the four secondary schools, namely Mfantsipim (1876), Adisadel (1910), Achimota (1927) and St. Augustine’s (1937), three were mission
establishments receiving grants-in-aid, while of the four teacher training colleges for men teachers three were mission institutions: Akropong (Presbyterian), Wesley (Methodist) and St. Augustine’s (Roman Catholic). The mission girls’ schools frequently held classes for women teachers.\textsuperscript{6,7} Groves (1958), however, observed that if the missions’ contribution to education in terms of schools and colleges, scholars and students was the preponderating one, it was essentially a cooperative enterprise since they received liberal assistance from the State.\textsuperscript{8}

Pupils were instructed in the English language. The core of work in the schools was designed to provide education of a vocational type to meet the aspirations of adolescents of the coastal towns whose ambition was to seek clerical work in the occupational structure connected with the European trade then flourishing during the second half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{9}

Meanwhile the Gold Coast was planning development in higher education to the university level. The impulse contributed by the Phelps-Stoke West African Commission in 1921 further encouraged the emphasis which Sir F. O. Guggisberg placed on education when he was appointed governor to the colony. In “The Keystone”, Guggisberg (1924) expounded a sound education as the keystone to progress in a secure economy; and in the same vein he enunciated to his Legislative Assembly in 1925 fifteen principles of education with an indication of what would be involved in acting upon them.\textsuperscript{10}

In the interim, however, the provision of secondary education continued to be a direct concern of the principal missions in the Gold Coast: Anglican, Wesleyan and Roman Catholic. In particular, Mfantsipim, the Methodist Boys’ School of Cape Coast, started in 1925 on a new career that was to raise it to the front rank of such institutions.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Adult Education}

Between 1835 and 1918 the churches embarked upon teaching illiterate adolescents and adults to enable them to read the Bible. Wilson (1968) pointed out that “the very fact of teaching Christianity involved education of a somewhat literary kind.\textsuperscript{12} They had to attend, compulsorily, week-day and evening catechumen classes for one year. The courses consisted of religious instructions (through Bible series), elementary church doctrine, as well as reading and writing.

\textit{Sunday Schools}

In addition to the catechumen classes, Sunday schools were also introduced in the 1870s among the adult members of the church to enable them read the
scriptures in their own vernacular, and also to encourage working men and women, who were the products of the grammar schools, to achieve a high degree of literacy as well as to motivate others who found fresh incentives in self-directed education.

**University extension courses**

Adult education in the form of University Extension courses, grew naturally from the activities of literary and cultural societies, and also in response to the needs of the literate but frustrated natives. Whereas the Oxford Delegacy sponsored university extra-mural studies programmes throughout the country, the British Council purchased many books from England to assist the courses. The provision of books for the University Extension Courses was greatly appreciated, and Governor J.A. Maclean thanked... “the British Council for its ‘substantial generosity’ in supplying the classes with books”.

**Publishing Activities of the Churches**

Gyedu (1974) observed that the missionaries were the first to take interest in the structure of the Gold Coast languages and to try to give them a written form. Bartels (1965) pointed out that it was through missionary enterprise that the first reading material in a Gold Coast language was produced between 1742 and 1746.

Missionary presses were set up for the speedy printing of religious books in the local languages. Starting from Cape Coast, Fante, a dialect in the Akan language, was reduced to writing and the Lord’s Prayer, parts of the Catechism, the Creed and the Ten Commandments published in it. These were followed by primers and readers. The availability of both religious books and textbooks which were used in the Sunday and regular schools, not only promoted literacy among the new literates, but also inculcated the reading habit in them. Indeed, many converts began to build up collections of religious books in their homes and encouraged their school-going children to attend Sunday Schools.

**Literary and Social Clubs**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century there emerged in the country, especially in Cape Coast, small professional classes of lawyers, doctors and merchants who had sought opportunities of professional education in Britain, and who on returning home, had become the small group often referred to as the intelligentsia. The ranks of the intelligentsia were later reinforced by the
products of the few grammar schools which have been founded along the coast.

These educated young men, referred to rather disparagingly by the Europeans as educated natives or Cape Coast Scholars have drifted in large numbers to the main towns to seek employment as clerks and artisans. They formed improvement societies, mainly literary and social clubs in their new environments. A great many of these clubs, as Kimble (1963) has observed, tended to be “over-ambitious, unstable and short-lived”. But the proliferation of the literary societies and clubs was largely due to the realization by their members of the need to improve upon their education, and the “growing desire for additional knowledge and personal advancement”.

The membership of these societies was made up predominantly of young clerks and school-teachers who were convinced that “it was upon expanded educational opportunity that their future well-being depended”. There was therefore a correlation between participation in literary societies and clubs and the desire for further education and knowledge.

These early associations realized the importance of post-basic education and encouraged their members to improve upon their education. Members of these societies put on sustained courses of study for which books were ordered and kept for their use. Other activities of these societies included essay-reading and literary criticisms based on prescribed texts assigned to members. They also organized debates and discussions, and free lectures were given by some of their members. Hagan (1968) has extensively reported on the literary activities of these associations. He pointed out that Dr. J. B. Danquah, who happened to be the patron of the Nationalist and Cosmo Literary Clubs, organised free lecture courses in Logic and Ethics for the members. Others also encouraged them to pursue correspondence courses from England, and lent them their course notes and set books, to enable them pass the Matriculation examination of the University of London. For example, the Optimist Literary Club of Accra decided in the early thirties to take a course in English Language, and one of its members, J. B. Kofi Karikari, an executive officer of the Survey Department volunteered to pay for the full cost of the correspondence course from England which was fifty shillings.

Hodgkin (1956) had pointed out that the Old Boys’ Association is one type of society which featured prominently in the Gold Coast during the period under review. Often its functions were predominantly social but sometimes it spread into other fields such as education. He cited the Old Achimotan Association as one such society which took the initiative in organising and conducting evening classes for workers in Kumasi in the period immediately following the Second World War.
Club Libraries

These societies and clubs had collections of books from which members could borrow books for home reading. They also provided reading rooms in the club houses where members could go to read for self improvement. The Try Company is credited with opening the first Reading Room in Cape Coast in 1860. Hagan (1968) reported that Mr. W. E. F. Ward, on becoming the only European member of the Young People’s Literary Club in Accra during the early 1930s, encouraged the club to build a modest library. Books were selected and ordered from England for the club library through his efforts. The Railway Club at Sekondi in 1933–34, was also encouraged by Mr. A. F. Kirby, an Englishman, to organise evening classes for the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of the Railway clerks. Prescribed texts were bought and kept in a library for use by members. The members enjoyed such a systematic study of literary works and soon discovered what a powerful influence such a study had had on their life and thinking generally.

The relevance of the activities of the literary associations to our purpose is that they provided library facilities of some sort in support of organised courses of study for their members through which most of them improved their educational standards and literacy.

The attainment of literacy made people aware of the need for social and economic advancement, and this to a considerable extent provided sufficient basis and motivation for the demand for more knowledge, and hence the demand for libraries. From the foregoing the demand for public library facilities was established and thus the opportunity was therefore ripe for the creation of public libraries for the literate public at the time the British Council came to the Gold Coast. In sum, we contend that the enlightenment and awareness made possible through both formal and self-directed education and free access to books and libraries provided the motivation for social and political development in the Gold Coast in the latter part of the 1940s, including the establishment of public libraries.

University Libraries

The three university libraries developed out of the Achimota College Library. The latter provided nucleus collections for the three libraries which were set up between 1948 and 1960. Thus they are relatively young libraries as university libraries go, since the mother library which spawned them was itself established only about sixty years ago. But their contribution to educational development in the country has been phenomenal, since they have built up comprehensive collections capable of sustaining the academic health,
the intellectual vitality and effectiveness of these universities. They also provide facilities to other scholars whose needs could not be met by other libraries.

**Special Libraries**

The colonial administration set up research institutes to support research activities in British West Africa. The earliest of such research centres was the West Africa Cocoa Research Institute whose library was set up in 1938. Others include the West African Building and Road Research Institute, the West African Institute of Health and Medical Research and the West African Research Organization. These research institutions were headquartered in the Gold Coast, and boasted libraries in support of their programmes.

**Council for Scientific and Industrial Research**

Independence ushered in new ideas and developments for Ghana, one of which was the founding of the Ghana Academy of Learning. Rapid advance in science and technology was seen as vital to the emancipation of the country and its people. Consequently two organizations were established – the National Research Council in 1958, and the Ghana Academy of Learning in 1959. The former, which was renamed the Ghana Academy of Sciences was designed to organise and co-ordinate all scientific activity in Ghana; the latter established to play the role of a learned society, was to promote the study, extension and dissemination of knowledge in all fields of sciences and learning.

It soon became apparent that the two organizations not only were complementary in their functions, but were also playing overlapping roles in their programmes. They merged in 1963 under the name Ghana Academy of Sciences. The Academy was reconstituted into two separate bodies in 1968, namely the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences. Control of research institutes passed to the new council, and the academy reverted to its previous status as a purely learned co-operative society.

The setting up of the CSIR opened up a new chapter in the development of special libraries within the country. A number of research institutes (totalling twelve, including the headquarters) were established, and to aid their research activities, these institutions set up their own libraries. Some of these institutes absorbed existing research institutions set up by the colonial administration and therefore their specialist collections and libraries, which have been built over the years. We have indicated elsewhere that the core of
librarians produced by the Ghana Library School went into these special libraries.

Although university and special libraries are not opened to the general public, they have made significant contributions to educational development and the advancement of knowledge in the country. By providing reading materials and study facilities to students and limited access to accredited scholars and researchers, these libraries play an important role in the educational sector.

Library Education

The first library school was set up by Miss E. S. Fegan and Miss E. Ferguson in the Gold Coast in 1944 at the Achimota College. As was the case with many institutions established in British West Africa in those days, the school was a joint venture of the three Colonial Governments of Gold Coast (now Ghana), Nigeria and Sierra Leone in association with the British Council. Fourteen students enrolled and were sponsored by their respective governments or some educational institutions.

The course started in September 1944 and ended in June 1945 when ten students successfully sat for the Entrance Examination of the British Library Association. This programme did not survive the first course mainly because the Advisory Committee of the Gold Coast Library Board decided that libraries were not likely to develop sufficiently to absorb more qualified staff. Evans (1956) emphasized that "... it would be a mistake to enroll students for whom there was no definite prospect of employment, so the course was discontinued after the one year".27

Apprenticeship Training

Before 1961 the method of training professional librarians in this country was based on the apprenticeship method and was organised by the Gold Coast Library Board. Members of staff of the Board with the necessary prerequisite qualifications were encouraged to undertake private study for the First Professional (FPE) and part of the Registration Examinations of the British Library Association. For this purpose classes were organised locally as a preparation for the courses overseas. Members of staff who have passed three of the six papers of the Registration Examinations were sent abroad to British Library schools to continue with their examinations and to become chartered librarians. Strickland (1959) stated that eight qualified Ghanaians who spent a year at English Library Schools under this programme had their training paid for by a grant of £5,000 ($14,000), being part of the funds
provided by the Carnegie Corporation for library training in the Gold Coast which had not been completely exhausted by the short-lived Achimota course of 1944.\footnote{30}

This remained the only means of training professional librarians until the Ghana Library School was set-up in 1961. It was admittedly expensive and in terms of number limited. It was considered by many library educators as a very slow process as scholarships were limited and only one or two members of staff could be trained at a time. Dean (1965) emphasised that it was also unrelated to the needs of West Africa librarianship that was beginning to take shape.\footnote{31} According to the Harrison report, quoted by Benge, during the ten year (1950–1960) period, only seventeen Ghanaian students qualified as chartered librarians.\footnote{32}

Benge and Olden (1981) observed that library education should be linked with library development generally, and this in turn needs to be part of a national development plan.\footnote{33} Although such conditions are not likely to exist in Africa, Ghana was lucky to have got her Prime minister sufficiently interested in library education by suggesting to the Ghana Library Board “...that consideration should be given to the establishment of a School of Librarianship in Ghana”\footnote{34}.

Subsequently Mr. J. C. Harrison, formerly Head of the Manchester School of Librarianship, was in 1960 commissioned by the Ghana Library Board to make recommendations for library education in Ghana. He submitted a report advocating a non-university school which would run courses for British examinations, and would be attached to the Headquarters of the Ghana Library Board in Accra. These recommendations were implemented in 1961.


ghana library school, 1961–1964

The Ghana Library School was set up in 1961, and the first fully organised courses began in January, 1962 in the storage rooms of the Ghana Library Board, with “approximately two dozen students” studying for the First Professional and Registration Examinations of the Library Association.\footnote{35} A separate new building alongside the Accra Central Library was completed in October, 1962, with two classrooms and a library and the school became residential with a hostel somewhere in Accra and the school bus plied to and fro.

The 1963 classes included among its thirty students, two from Sierra Leone, and three from Nigeria. Students who enrolled for the two courses had financial assistance in various forms.

The policies of the School were similar to those of British Library Schools,
and this at that time was considered appropriate since it had been decided to proceed with the British Examinations for the time being.\textsuperscript{36}

Although conditions were propitious for the setting up of a school for the production of librarians with A.L.A. qualification, it was recognised by all those involved that ultimately the programme would have to be planned all over again in the University of Ghana. This is what eventually happened and this time the planning was successful for different reasons given by Benge.\textsuperscript{37} In October, 1965, the Ghana Library School (or rather its functions, some of its staff and equipment) was moved to and absorbed by the University of Ghana as the Department of Library Studies within the Faculty of Social Sciences. The department’s programmes have been discussed elsewhere,\textsuperscript{38} and these fall outside the scope of this paper.

During the four-year period the School was in existence, it produced forty-eight qualified librarians – eight of them from Nigeria and one from Sierra Leone. When one considers the fact that in 1961 there were less than 30 qualified librarians who had mostly received their training from the United Kingdom, then the contribution of the Ghana Library School was no mean achievement. The staff shortage at the senior staff level within the profession was overcome to some extent for the time being. It is significant to note that a high proportion of the school’s products went into special libraries which experienced considerable development during the period under review. We have observed elsewhere that the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research set up a number of special libraries in the 1960s to support its scientific and research activities.

\textbf{Government Support}

It must be emphasised that the government recognised the provision of library services as an essential element in the national scheme of educational advancement. Consequently the indigenous government after independence made heavy budgetary allocations to the Ghana Library Board each year. President Kwame Nkrumah stated this categorically in his foreword to Miss Evans’ book.\textsuperscript{39} The personal initiative of the President in setting up the Ghana Library School for the production of librarians locally is a further indication of the importance the government attached to the development of libraries as an ally to education in the country.

\textbf{Conclusion}

We have isolated certain basic factors which, it seems to us, have been important in influencing the development of library services in the country.
before and up to the coming of the British Council and the Gold Coast Library Board and thereafter. As the establishment of a public library presupposes the presence of a literate community it is concluded that the introduction of formal education by the Churches (through the establishment of regular schools), gave a big boost to both the British Council and the Gold Coast Library Board in their efforts.

The literary societies and improvement clubs which also proliferated between the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries along the coast, and which spread to other large towns, aroused the thirst for reading as well as suitable reading materials which incidentally constitute the twin vital elements of any viable library venture. Indeed, since the Gold Coast literary clubs provided free library facilities to members it could be rightly considered as being responsible for introducing modern public library idea into the Gold Coast, for the free access accords with the traditional principles of library movements in the Western world.

We emphasize that education and, by implication perhaps, the use of libraries produce “development”. The attainment of literacy makes people aware of the need for social and economic improvement, and will therefore make them co-operate more readily with welfare and other agencies working on these lines. Health measures in the home and the community at large, enlightened training of children, budgeting and account keeping and the like become possible and readily acceptable to a literate people.

It is in this light that the impact of missionary activities on the community within which they operated, the proliferation of literary societies and clubs in the country at the time, the support by individuals, notably Bishop Aglionby and the state, and the provision of training facilities for library personnel both locally and abroad are considered as other favourable factors which influenced library development in the country.

Although the British Council and the Gold Coast Library Board made significant contributions to public library development in the Gold Coast (and later Ghana) these other propitious factors gave a boost to their efforts, and should therefore be given appropriate emphasis and recognition in the annals of library development in this country.

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References and Notes

28. School Certificate with at least five credits, two of which must be English Language and a foreign language.

Bibliography


