

## **The Journal of Sierra Leone Studies – Volume, Edition 2, 2018.**

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.

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## **Note from the Editor**

### **Introduction**

With the technical problems associated with copying editions from the 1920's through to the beginnings of World War II, I have decided to switch my attention to the recent collection of books published on Sierra Leone. Some are by members of a new generation who are now interested in the country, whilst others are by more 'seasoned' writers, who continue to research and publish on issues related to this corner of West Africa. I have booked at day at The British Library and I will scan an article from each decade from 1918-1970. The centenary edition will appear early in 2019, followed by edition two for that year.

John

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### **James Robbin: An "accidental revolutionary" in the agitation for a Native Episcopate in Sierra Leone**

**Kayode Adesimi Robbin-Coker**

In the early days of the London-based Church Missionary Society (CMS) the Bishops heading the various missions in West Africa were all without exception European (and usually British). There had been a brief flirtation with the idea of appointing an African Bishop of Sierra Leone following the deaths, in rapid succession, of the first three European bishops of that colony.<sup>1</sup> The obvious contender for the role of "native"<sup>2</sup> bishop at the time was the Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther who, as the first student at Fourah Bay College and a London-trained and ordained minister, was already establishing quite a reputation in West Africa and beyond. However Henry Venn, the Secretary of the CMS, was against this as Crowther had been earmarked for "more important things" in Nigeria (a statistically more significant CMS priority than Sierra Leone). Another objection attributed to Venn was that he considered Sierra Leone "too much of an English colony" and thought the appointment of a native bishop would complicate relations with the Europeans settlers in political control of the colony. So the matter of appointing native bishops in the West African missions was relegated to the side lines for the time being, despite periodic protestations by sections of the clergy and laity in Sierra Leone and Nigeria especially.

Venn moved relatively swiftly to demonstrate his commitment to the advancement of native clergy by securing the appointment of Samuel Ajayi Crowther as the first African Bishop in 1864:<sup>3</sup> an act which might have been viewed, initially, as heralding a sea change in attitude among the CMS decision makers. But progress was still painfully slow, and when in fact the issue resurfaced after Venn's death in 1873, the focus was once again Nigeria, not Sierra Leone. An African priest James Johnson was briefly in the frame for one of two proposed bishoprics in Lagos and Abeokuta but in the end it was decided he was too young and inexperienced so the possibility of increasing the number of African bishops in Nigeria was shelved.

In 1881 Henry Cheetham resigned his position as Bishop of the colony of Sierra Leone and returned to England, prompting much speculation about a possible African successor. But no substantive appointment was announced in the ensuing months. One obvious contender was the well-respected Reverend James Quaker, but he died unexpectedly in May 1882, aged 54. Perhaps not surprisingly, James Johnson of Nigeria's name came up again. But the CMS still had him earmarked for one of the larger Nigerian missions, so the continuing advocacy for his appointment to a senior position in Sierra Leone went unheeded. Another European, Graham Ingham,<sup>4</sup> succeeded Cheetham instead.

Not everyone was convinced of the need for a native episcopacy, anyhow. There was a lot of infighting between African clergy and laity at the time and of course some European missionaries and administrators shared apprehensions about too much power, religious or secular, being given too quickly to their colonial subjects. In a contemporary article entitled "The Bishopric of Sierra Leone" the anonymous author began by admitting "the great desirableness of having a Bishop of our own race ..." but goes on to argue that "after a calm survey of the 'signs of the times' ... we are forced, regretfully and with a sigh to declare, 'Not now a native Bishop of Sierra Leone; not just yet'"<sup>5</sup>.

This view of "Not now ... Not just yet" coming from the natives themselves would no doubt have been rather disconcerting to some but was also clearly beginning to gain traction, with influential voices endorsing proposals for moving forward in small steps – first a native archdeacon, then a native assistant bishop and finally a fully-fledged African bishop.

This was the backdrop to Bishop Ingham's arrival in Sierra Leone in March 1883 as Cheetham's successor, three weeks after his own consecration in London on 24 February. After what appeared to be a promising start, with a well-received installation sermon preached at St George's Cathedral, it was soon business as usual for Ingham as far as attitudes towards the colony's Christian population was concerned. One of his first actions as the new Bishop of Sierra Leone was to deny the Reverend T. Truscott (a United Methodist Free Church minister) permission to preach at the Church of the Holy Trinity, giving as his reason that this would not have been "allowed in England." This considerably upset the locals as pulpit-exchange was a common and respected tradition among the churches. But Ingham was adamant and unrepentant. He had barely-concealed contempt for, and a decidedly condescending view of, the African clergy.

Bishop Ingham was clearly not the sort of man who would, ordinarily, have paid much heed to the calls for a native episcopacy which continued apace in the colony. But these were not ordinary times. For one thing, the mortality rate among European missionaries had been rising rather alarmingly and there were gaps in the staffing of the missions that needed to be filled.

In the circumstances, Ingham decided, probably with some reluctance, to appoint the first African “Bishop’s Deputy” or commissary in Sierra Leone. The clergyman he chose was my (paternal) great great grand uncle Reverend James Robbin who was vicar of St Augustine’s, Regent at the time. James Robbin was a Colony-born Christian of Yoruba descent. He trained at the Christian Institution (later Fourah Bay College) and served as Catechist in various parts of the Colony including Kissy, Aberdeen and Bathurst. He became a Deacon in the Anglican Communion in May 1859 and was ordained priest by the Bishop of Sierra Leone (Edward Beckles) in 1861. He was stationed in the Lagos/Abeokuta area for a time before returning to Sierra Leone. He also acted as Government Chaplain in the Cape Coast (Ghana) and Bathurst (The Gambia).

Ingham saw James Robbin as the ideal choice for a supporting role to a European Bishop of Sierra Leone - competent, well-respected, yet of a different temperament from some of the more assertive native candidates that might have been considered - men such as Reverend George Macauley of Wellington who was continually upbraiding the European missionaries for their lack of respect for the African laity and clergy and who had previously led calls for the advancement of native clergy into positions at least closer in rank if not equal to the European-held bishoprics. In fact Ingham’s predecessor (Cheetham) is said to have once described James Robbin as “slow and dull” but Ingham would probably have considered this a positive recommendation.

A few years later (in 1887) Ingham again demonstrated his confidence in James Robbin by appointing him as the first African Archdeacon of the colony of Sierra Leone and vicar of The Church of the Holy Trinity in Kissy Road, Freetown, a position Robbin held until his death.

Little is known of the impact, if any, that Robbin’s appointment as Archdeacon had on the fevered pitch of local church politics at the time of his appointment; it is possible the natives may have been pacified for a time by the bestowal of this (relatively) high office on one of their own. Certainly Robbin appears to have played the low-keyed role anticipated by Ingham to near perfection.

It has to be said that Robbin’s appointment aside, there was no discernible change in terms of succession to the top job in Sierra Leone – the next five holders of the office of Bishop after Ingham’s tenure ended in 1897 were all Europeans.<sup>6</sup> This would appear in marked contrast to the situation in Nigeria where, as far back as 1864, Samuel Ajayi Crowther had been installed as the first African bishop. Ironically, though, Robbin’s unexpectedly meteoric rise more or less coincided with what might best be described as the success of the counter-revolutionary forces in Nigeria. For by the 1880s the “Brave New Dawn” heralded by Crowther’s appointment as Bishop had given way to systematic undermining of Crowther’s administration by, in the main, European (British) missionaries:

Mission policy, racial attitudes, and evangelical spirituality had taken new directions ... By degrees, Crowther’s mission was dismantled: by

financial controls, by young Europeans taking over, by dismissing, suspending, or transferring the African staff. Crowther, desolated, died of a stroke [in 1891]. A European bishop succeeded him.<sup>7</sup>

Plus ca change. It would take another 74 years from the date of James Robbin's consecration as Archdeacon for the European stranglehold on the Sierra Leonean bishopric to be finally broken.

But broken it indeed was at last, and it could be said that James Robbin, one of the most un-revolutionary figures of the time was, *mutatis mutandis*, the first in a line of homegrown personnel that appeared to be heading, at last, in the right direction – towards a full native episcopacy in Sierra Leone. It was a line ultimately and vigorously underwritten at various stages by a succession of lay and clerical rebels against perceived European suppression of native aspirations, eventually leading to the accession of Moses Nathaniel Christopher Omobiala Scott as the first African Bishop of an independent Sierra Leone in 1961 and as Archbishop of the Province of West Africa in 1969.

## Notes

Primary sources of information for this paper are:

- (i) The Church Missionary Society Archives ([www.ampltd.co.uk](http://www.ampltd.co.uk))
- (ii) The Dictionary of African Christian Biography (<https://dacb.org>)
- (iii) Jehu Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission: African Church Autonomy in a Colonial Context* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002)

1. Bishops Owen Vidal (1852 – 1854, died at sea, 1854) John Weeks (1855 – 1857, died in office of “African Sickness”) and John Bowen (1857 – 1860, died in office of Yellow Fever).
2. “Native” is used in the understood context of colonial-era references to “African”.
3. Crowther's full title was “Bishop of the countries of Western Africa beyond the Queen's dominions.”
4. Ingham Street, Freetown is very likely named after him.
5. *The Freetown Express and Christian Observer*, 17 November 1882.
6. Bishops John Taylor Smith (1897 – 1901), Edmund Elwin (1902 – 1909), John Walmsley (1910 – 1921), George Wright (1923 – 1936) and James L.C. Horstead (1936 – 1961).
7. <https://dacb.org/stories/nigeria/crowther5-samuel/>

## **Book Reviews**

**Deirdre Coleman. Henry Smeathman, the Flycatcher: Natural History, Slavery and Empire in the Late Eighteenth Century. Liverpool University Press, 2018.**

Deirdre Coleman has written a 322-page book about Henry Smeathman, an English naturalist who worked in Sierra Leone from 1771 to 1775 and in 1786 published a book suggesting a British colony there. He was prepared to lead this project, but died the same year. Deirdre Coleman is now a professor at the University of Melbourne. She has since 1999 has published several books on the early history of Sierra Leone. For this book, she has researched archives in Australia, England and Sweden, including Smeathman's letters to his English patrons; there is a twenty-page bibliography.

Henry Smeathman died in 1786, the year of the first European settlement, Granvilletown. What came to be Conakry and Monrovia were also considered, but Smeathman had four years' experience of the Freetown peninsula. None of the directors of the Sierra Leone Company had ever been in Africa or even considered visiting Freetown.

Smeathman was sent to Sierra Leone to collect specimens of plants insects and animals, but he became interested in African culture, medicine, hygiene and building technique. This helped him survive four years in what came to be called "the white man's grave". He advised his young Swedish assistant, Anders Berlin, to drink less and to find an African mistress. Berlin didn't take his advice and died within a year.

Before returning to England, Smeathman spent two years in the West Indies before returning to England. He had thus six years acquaintance with the slave trade, which was cruelly conducted and socially destructive of an Africa that could have been a trading partner with Europe.

This is an expensive book, with thirty-five illustrations in colour, many published for the first time, but it is an indispensable contribution to the study of West African history.

Jonathan Howard

### **New Writers – reviewed by John Birchall**

**The Politics of Work in a Post-Conflict State – Youth, Labour and violence in Sierra Leone – Luisa Enria – James Currey – ISBN 978-1-84701-198-5**

Luisa's most interesting and necessary book looks in considerable detail at the probable causes of and the subsequent impact of youth unemployment in Sierra Leone. She shows how its influence in this potentially volatile section of the population might persuade some youth to participate in the conventional political life of Sierra Leone, so feeling that they might have a direct influence of the choice of leaders. This would be an unusual outcome but is one that is gaining support amongst those most vulnerable to exploitation and life 'on the streets'.

She carefully traces the living environs and lack of genuine opportunities that is the way of life for many young people in Sierra Leone. She shows that this is linked to cultural behaviour and the 'ways of life' of those who live, work and mature on the streets of Freetown and other cities in a country, which to-date, has not offered any real and meaningful employment opportunities to its emerging youth – both female and male.

How do such disparate groups, meet, engage and find some sense of purpose in a life that otherwise holds little real hope of allowing them to utilise whatever formal education they may have received and begin to look to adulthood as a time when they live in ways still reserved for just a privileged few.

Her well researched analysis looks in considerable detail as to how any form of meaningful economic and social development will impact on those who increasingly feel marginalised and wondering what, if anything, their country can offer them. Her interviews with these young people are both candid and informative and those sitting in positions of responsibility should be made aware of what some many young people.

She notes with a genuine concern the largely yet to be well explored areas of post-conflict life; she notes how delicately balanced the 'peace' is when so many feel marginalised and ignored by the State that asks for their support.

Those of us who have known the streets of Freetown for many years, know exactly what can happen when bored and desperate youth decide to align with a cause that allows them to orchestrate their anger on those who with genuine concern dare to argue against their new-found political masters. \*

The book uses considerable, well selected empirical evidence and mixes this with 'street' talk and the ways of young people whose lives are led on the streets of Freetown and how they, in turn, finds ways of 'being young' and holding similar ambitions and desires just like most young people dream of wherever they may spend their formative years.

One is left with a deep admiration for these young people, who engage in ways of surviving that they would not normally select and suffer the consequences of illegality, vice and other desperate acts – all of which allow them to simply survive.

She looks in detail at how social systems emerge within the youth groups, with language, behaviour and norms being forged and forming a sense of united identity that may have serious consequences for those who lead a country, where for generations the noticeable wealth has been kept by a few and much has been syphoned away by both individuals and external -based corporations.

Luisa rightly asks for how long the young of a sprawling city, whose infrastructure was designed for a population of about 350,000, will remain compliant. As I write, no young voice has emerged who could galvanise their support, if it does he or she would have numerous role models to copy in a world where 'populism' is now a growing and powerful political force.

For those not familiar with Freetown youth and its ways, Luisa spends time analysing language and the ways in which those who live within the most informal of 'informal economies' socialise, be 'young' and hope that the political class develops meaningful ways in which they too might live in ways which others so clearly enjoy – her work is written in a way that is not deliberately emotional, but one if left in no doubt that these young men and women deserve our admiration and hopefully, one day our assistance.

Peace and reconciliation have become popular words in the 'development movement' yet as this well written, researched and informative work shows us, what lies just beneath the surface of any peace settlement is an anger, frustration and a much needed and genuine desire to participate in the development of what is 'their country' and this must be addressed by those in power - they simply seek to be helped to play their part.

The planners and their political leaders must react positively to a substantial number of young people, born either into a war-torn country or in the immediate period after peace was achieved, who have similar ambitions to any conventional young person. Put bluntly, their youth has and is being stolen from them and their patience is not endless.

At no time does the author wander into the emotive dialogue that I may have been guilty of doing, no she reports with great accuracy, she lives with these people and learns of their ways. She neither sides with them or suggests ways in which they might change both their behaviour and possibly the circumstances under which they live. I suspect her admiration for those she met is such that to be in anyway patronising would not have crossed her mind.

Poignant, researched in noticeable depth and as others have noted 'it shows how those who live on the margins of society survive or otherwise and how all of this relates to the overarching discourses surrounding peacekeeping, and security'.

Readers will be left in no doubt that this substantial and social media savvy section of Freetown's population have established a unique way of life. Their patience has been tested and one wonders for how long they will remain silent and not engaged in the formal political processes of what is their country as much as it is those in power and in being so have accepted a responsibility to address the legitimate grievances of this section of the electorate.

An essential addition to the analysis needed when coming to terms with the civil war, its aftermath and the most productive ways of engaging in an inclusive development model for Freetown and elsewhere in Sierra Leone.

John – October 2018.

\*I lived in Fourah Bay Road in 1973 and witnessed the violence that young people exploded into when wanting the local SLPP candidate to be defeated in the upcoming election. All of us feared for our lives and I was moved to Murray Town, never returning to my old home in Lower Savage Street. We can see on our TV screens, phones etc today how such incidents are still taking place across Africa and elsewhere – frustrated youth, with their lives ahead of them are easy to manipulate.

### **Children, Education and Empire in Early Sierra Leone – Katrina Keefer – Routledge, ISBN 978-0-8153-5396-6**

Those familiar with the history of Sierra Leone will know of its role in the spreading of ‘western’ education throughout the coastal region of West Africa. Sadly, in the United Kingdom, few students prior to a relevant university course, learn of the abolitionist movement, the founding of modern Freetown and the eventual colonising of the ‘protectorate,’ which led to the emergence of modern Sierra Leone. Indeed, the excesses of slavery and the creation of an Empire have very little coverage in the secondary years of education.

The inherent contradictions in this presence of those well-meaning, though possibly ill-informed people, is accurately analysed and commented on in this in Katrina’s detailed study of this crucial time in the development of Freetown. It’s re-assuring to note a new, younger generation of academics whose interests focus on Sierra Leone and its influence in British West Africa.

The founding of the Colony and the role of the recently created ‘missionary’ movement in Great Britain, are accurately traced and a range of sources given, all of which will better inform those who, in future years, wonder just how this small corner of West Africa became a British colony and played such an important part in the ways in which The Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria came to be the nation states they are today.

The sheer sense of ‘certainty’ in the beliefs of the majority who journeyed to Freetown is seldom easy to understand in what is an increasingly secular age. A variety of individuals from diverse backgrounds and nationalities, came to West Africa and especially Freetown, determined to alter the ways in which generations of indigenous people had evolved. They questioned traditional beliefs, cultural systems and structures that had shaped how these had lived their lives and developed communal systems and values. It is easy to criticise, and many have done but one must accept the certainty many had as to their God, the essentials of their religion and how this would be introduced to people whose ethnicity contained little relevant comparisons.

With great care and attention to detail Katrina traces the beginnings of the villages, their schools and ways of life. One must feel some sympathy for the re-captives, who must have been at best ‘surprised’ by what awaited them when they landed at or near Government Wharf. Little did they appreciate that they were to be part of the origins of a formal education system that would evolve into one containing primary/elementary schools, secondary/high schools and a tertiary sector that would be predominant in educating and training administrators, clergy and teachers whose influence would be felt across all British West Africa. In most cases the initial impetus for a western styled education – with its role model being that reserved for but a privileged few in the United Kingdom – came from religious organisations and their missionaries. It was only in the early days of the last century that the Colonial Government began to provide and staff schools. Those exposed to ‘western ways’, who were comfortable with both spoken and written English became the elite amongst Africans, both in Freetown and in the major cities of the Protectorate.

As befits a study of this depth and width, Keefer has researched assiduously the records of teachers, pupils and others who featured in the embryonic education system of the Colony and how such groups went onto influence life in Freetown and beyond.



The Appendix is a splendid addition to the historic details we have of those early years and will be of use to others who study how this experiment in 'exporting' education was applied and its ramifications.

I was particularly interested in the Conclusion, which notes in detail the tentacles of education emanating from Freetown and how it influenced others along the coast. Another issue that is noted and will doubtless require further research, was the emergence of Muslim schools and their influence on an alternative 'educated elite'. I was also interested to read of the lack of racial criticism amongst the missionaries and one is left wondering what might have evolved if colonial civil servants had not been 'imported' to Sierra Leone and allowed to become the most powerful source of decision-making – their decisions seldom included much attention being paid to traditions, beliefs and the strongly held cultural aspects of life, which had bound these people together for centuries. The 'top down', very Victorian way of suggesting that we were right and you were automatically wrong, may not have gained the hold it did within Empire, if greater flexibility and understanding of the indigenous people had been appreciated and listened to and one can only speculate how all aspects of life, economic, political and social might now be different in post-colonial West Africa if the citizens of Empire had been appreciated for the knowledge and ability to offer constructive suggestions regarding governance and its application.

Katrina's research has allowed us to consider further the role of 'western education' in both Sierra Leone and elsewhere on the West African coast.

As I noted in my preface, the arrival of new, young academics with a serious interest in Sierra Leone, is very refreshing to note. The third in my review section is:

**Tools of War, Tools of State – When children become soldier - Robert Tyne's - Suny Press, ISBN 978-1-4384-7199-0**

It is now moving towards twenty years since the civil war in Sierra Leone came to its end. Of the many atrocities that took place, the abduction and use of children as soldiers and spies, remains for many the most hideous practice that arose during the years of conflict. The author analyses in chilling depth the ways in which such young people were used in warfare and notes that such manipulation of young people is neither new nor reserved for the wars that affected several African countries in the last quarter of the twentieth century. He widens the geographic and historic analysis of children in war to include conflicts in Columbia, Vietnam and Afghanistan.

The author carefully shows the reader that the use of child soldiers, which is sometimes portrayed as an exclusively African way of warfare, was used in various conflict zones and he suggests that its origins might lie in Mao's protracted war theory and that it is not really surprising to witness the continued militarisation of youth that took place during the last century.

Those referring to The Journal of Sierra Leone studies will probably be most interested in the chapter dedicated to the use of child combatants in Sierra Leone, however, to fully appreciate the complex causes of the use of young people to fight what is normally an adult only pursuit, the reader should look in detail at other chapters in the book – where with careful analysis of both causes and effects the author shows how widespread this awful practice was and how the manipulation of youth was associated with hideous consequences both for the combatants and their victims.

The author has spent much time researching the use of child soldiers in various conflicts and the data used will be of special interest to those who work lies in a wider geo-political awareness than that referring just to Africa. He looks in detail at how academics have researched this difficult topics and has shown just how vulnerable young people are and how all of us need to become more aware of how the young can be drawn into conflicts and become killers, rapists and sadistic conveyors of what we think to be the preserve of the professionally trained and some may de-humanised adult. His extensive bibliography will be invaluable to others who become interested in just how, why, where etc. the innocence of the young was transformed into a calculated and hideous killer.

The chapter that analyses the use of child soldiers in Sierra Leone is disturbing but is essential reading fore those who are interested in how modern warfare uses all resources at its dispoable – regardless of age, gender or belief.

The other chapters focus on how States, regimes and religious beliefs have utilised the young as part of their 'fighting machine', and that this continues and will do – that is unless this well researched book does reach those who consider such actions as to utilise the innocence of youth as a factor in military strategies.

I recommend this book to all who are interested in how this Sierra Leone, rich yet vulnerable country was thrust into modern ways of warfare and at a hideous cost to its people, especially its youth.

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More reviews will appear in the next edition, which should contain examples taken from the archives of 1918 onwards.

John

October 2018.