

THE GHANA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION – THE FIRST 25 YEARS

BY

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The Ghana Library Association was twenty-five years old in 1987. This paper traces its origins and growth from the early days of the West African Library Association in 1953. It also examines its problems and makes prospects for its future.

The Background

In 1953, Unesco organised a seminar on the development of Public Libraries in Africa at the University College, Ibadan, from July 27-August 21st. The seminar was concerned with three main topics; organisation of public library services, audio visual materials and training.

Recommendation 16 of the final report stipulated that "Librarians working in various regions of Africa should take practical steps to form dynamic professional library associations as rapidly as possible. When formed, such associations should draw up carefully planned programmes of action aimed at stimulating and assisting library development in Africa, and achieving adequate recognition for the library profession."¹

The West African Library Association (WALA) was thus provisionally organised at the Ibadan seminar in accordance with the recommen-

dation quoted above.

The inaugural conference was held in Lagos, on Saturday and Sunday, September 25th and 26th, 1954. It was attended by fifty persons, including two from Northern Nigeria, seven from the Gold Coast, twenty from Western Nigeria and twenty-one from Federal Nigeria Territory.

The Gold Coast delegates included Mr. Kenneth Middlemast and Mr. K. Ata Caesar of the Ghana Library Board; Miss K.E. Walker, Mr. E.E. Ghansah and Mr. J.C. Harley of the University College of the Gold Coast; Mr. G.C.O. Lamptey of the Kumasi College of Technology.

The aims of the association were to unite all persons interested in libraries and librarianship, to promote the interests of the profession and the establishment and development of libraries within the English speaking territories of West Africa,

and to encourage bibliographical study and research and library co-operation. These aims were to be carried out "by holding conferences and meetings, by issuing publications and by any other means".² The aims were much the same as those of similar library associations which already, existed in many other countries. However the association was inter-territorial, disregarding political and national boundaries in favour of professional and cultural objects in various countries. In addition it owned nothing to governments.

Messages of greetings and good wishes were received from Unesco, The Library Association of Great Britain, The Institut Francais of Afrique Noire (IFAN) and the New Zealand Library Association.

The following message from Mr. Luther H. Evans, then Director General of Unesco was received.

"I was delighted to learn that the West African Library Association which was provisionally organised at the Ibadan Seminar will soon hold its first conference in Lagos. This is indeed good news, for I am sure that the new Association will in time have a very beneficial effect on Library development in the contries represented.

I hope that in mapping out the work it intends to do, the Association will seek ways of collaborations with Unesco and of taking advantage of any opportunities for

assistance offered by this Organisation.

I should be grateful if you will convey to the Conference my best wishes for a successful and inspiring meeting which will open the door to many future activities to be undertaken by the West African Library Association."

Mr. W.T. Mackell, the Inspector General of Education for Nigeria opened the conference. He welcomed members warmly and said among other things "that libraries are an essential service in any modern community, providing citizens with the information and instruction necessary to a democratic way of life, as well as means of enjoyment and relaxation." His talk was followed by an objective and inspiring one by the first President, Mr John Harris of University College, Ibadan. The first Secretary was Mr. Kalu Okorie, then of the Lagos Municipal Library.

Theme of the conference was "The place of libraries and Librarianship in rapidly developing countries — with emphasis on libraries and education, and part to be played by a library association.

A new council of fifteen members was elected and concerned itself with the establishment of a news bulletin "WALA NEWS" and the preparation of a constitution for the association. The association was organised in Divisions on a

territorial basis but was controlled by a central council. Nigeria and the Gold Coast established divisions each with its own committee for the organisation of divisional activities.

Annual conferences were organised alternately in Nigeria, Lagos and Ibadan and in the Gold Coast, Accra and Kumasi.

At the Annual General Meeting of the West African Library Association held on 18th June, 1961, in the Committee Room, House of Representatives, Lagos the following motion was passed.

“That, believing it essential for library development in West Africa that strong national associations be developed within each territory, this conference is in favour of the reconstitution of the West African Library Association as a federation of national library associations and requests council to make necessary arrangements to implement this”.³

Inauguration of the Ghana Library Association: 1962-1964

The Ghana Divisional Committee in collaboration with the Central Council of West African Library Association nominated a sub-committee in June, 1962 with the task of preparing a constitution and of organising an inaugural conference for the new association. The com-

As a result of the resolution council decided to take postal ballot on a number of proposals. Among them were the:

- (i) aims of the federation;
- (ii) membership of the federation
- (iii) the Executive Body;
- (iv) Finance;
- (v) member association and the existing WALA Funds.

It is not clear what happened to these proposals. What is clear is that instead of the proposed federation, national library associations emerged in Ghana and Nigeria. This was the era of political independence in both countries and a number of West African Organisation e.g. West African Cocoa Research Institute (WACRI), West African Court of Appeal (WACA), West African Airways Corporation (WAAC), began to fragment into individual national bodies. There were therefore very positive advantages for creating these strong national associations at that time.

mittee consisted of Mr. John Dean, Mr. E.Y. Amedekey and Miss E.M. Moys, all of the Balme Library, University of Ghana. The committee worked fast and arranged the inaugural conference from June 29th-July 1st, 1962 at the Volta Hall, University of Ghana, Legon.

The theme selected for the conference was "Library Design In the Tropics". It was decided to make concerted efforts to bring as many librarians and architects together for "a consideration and evaluation of architectural problems in relation to libraries".

The conference was duly opened in the evening of Friday, June 29th. Seventy-Five delegates were registered including several from Nigeria. Guests were received and welcomed by Dr. Marion Petrie, Chairman of the Ghana Division of West African Library Association and Librarian of the West African Building Research Institute. A cocktail and dinner were held to which many distinguished guests were invited. The guests of honour were Mrs. Susan Alhassan, M.P. and Deputy Minister of Education and Nana Kobina Nketsia IV, Omanhene of Essikado, Sekondi, and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, who formally welcomed the guests and delegates to Legon. In his address he recalled that nine years previously, the West African Library Association had been inaugurated at a time when there were few qualified librarians in West Africa and when the great libraries, both university and public in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone had scarcely gained momentum. He outlined the changes that had taken place and reviewed the present situation. He recalled that the

West African Library Association had in spite of difficulties and delays of inter territorial communication achieved much and expressed the hope that it would soon thrive as a federation of national library associations. In conclusion Nana Nketsia described the library as an essential instrument of education. The effectiveness of this instrument depends upon the calibre of the librarians and that to a great extent depends upon a good professional environment. A vital factor in the development of this environment in any country is its library association, which encourages research institutes, education programmes, represents the individual librarian in all negotiations and above all establishes professional standards."⁴

The main item on the agenda for the Annual General Meeting of the Ghana Division of West African Library Association was the inauguration of the new Ghana Library Association. The constitution proposed by the sub-committee set up for the purpose was considered and after one or two amendments the proposals were accepted and the new Library Association of Ghana was born.

The Ghana Library Association was now established and has taken its place among the Library Associations of the world.

Mr. G.M. Pitcher was elected the first President. At the first meet-

ing of the council Mr. S.A. Afre was appointed first honorary secretary. Matters which received attention included Government recognition of the Association. This was announced in the Ghana Gazette No. 17, Friday, 29th March, 1963, p.228.

The announcement was as follows:

GHANA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

"It is notified for general information that the Ghana Library Association has been recognised by the Government of Ghana as the body representing professional librarians in Ghana".

Signed: J.O. Vanderpuye
for Acting Principal Secretary

Membership of the Association is open to individuals and institutions throughout Ghana interested in the development of libraries of all kinds and in librarianship generally. Individuals and institutions in other parts of Africa and elsewhere may also become members.

The objectives of the association are as follows:

- (1) To unite all persons and institutions in Ghana interested in libraries and librarianship.
- (2) To safeguard and promote the professional interests of Librarians in Ghana.
- (3) To assist in promoting the es-

tablishment and development of libraries, bibliographical work and library co-operation in Ghana.

In pursuance of these objectives the Association holds an annual conference which all members may attend and at which matters of mutual interest are discussed.

The Association publishes the Ghana Library Journal which contains conference papers and articles of general and professional interest and news of activities of the various branches.

The first editor appointed by the Council was Mr. R.C. Bengé, then Principal of the Ghana Library School.

In his maiden editorial Mr. Bengé wrote among other things as follows . . . "The Ghana Library Association is now a year old infant, and it is time for it to begin its baby talk. Without a journal the Library Association could not survive . . . a policy for the Ghana Library suggests itself. Firstly should mirror the progress of the library profession in Ghana (if in some areas there is no progress it is important that this should be recorded too). Records are necessarily dull reading, but they are none the worse for that. They are set down for future reference so that members of the library profession become fully conscious of what went before. Secondly the

journal will naturally provide a link between all those concerned with libraries in any capacity both within Ghana and throughout the world. By such means the members of a small and struggling profession can transcend the hierarchies of their limited situations.

Lastly we should appeal to — and serve the interests of — as many people as possible. For this reason we shall include items of value for all types of librarians (including school librarians) and also for book sellers, publishers and everyone who appreciates the importance of books in a modern community.”⁵ Initially the journal was published three times a year in February, July and October. (Subscription — 15 shillings per annum).

It is interesting to observe that at the first annual general meeting a number of far reaching motions were passed, prominent among them were the following:

1. “That the Council of the Association should find ways and means of organising week-end and vocational courses in Librarianship open to all librarians, but for teachers insitutional libraries in particular to enable them to run their libraries more effectively. (Proposed by the students section, Ghana Library Association).
2. That the Council institute as part of its educational programme a

“National Library Week” during which activities aimed at educating the public on libraries and their services are to be organised. (Proposed by the students section Ghana Library Association).

3. That the conference decide on the appropriate steps to ensure that all engaged in library work and who are not qualified to be members of the Association register accordingly (Proposed by students section, Ghana Library Association)”. It must be noted that there was at this time a very active students section popularly known as “The Ginger Group”.
4. That a special General Meeting should be convened by the Ghana Library Association within one month to work out minimum salary scales for all grades of librarians in Ghana. (Proposed by Mr. J.E. Linford, Lecturer at the Library School).

After a full debate on these motions and further discussions a number of committees were established to work on the details.

Giving an account of work done under his presidency, Mr. G.M. Pitcher regretted that the council had not been able to implement all the resolutions of the previous A.G.M. This was not due to any lack of awareness of the council's responsibilities but rather to a series of unfortunate events and circum-

stances. Nevertheless he was happy to say that a certain measure of success had been achieved amongst which was the acceptance by Madam Fathia Nkrumah to be the first Patron of the Ghana Library Association.

The President reminded members of the ideals of the librarian's profession and suggested that pride in ones profession was best expressed in devotion to duty, active participation in conferences and support for the professional organisations. Before closing his address Mr. Pitcher expressed his thanks on behalf of the Association to Mr. Kalu Okorie, Regional Librarian, Eastern Nigerian Library Board for attending as an observer".⁶

Outstanding and important matters dealt with by the Council under the presidency of Mr. E.K. Koranteng during the period 1963/64 included the following:

A memorandum on school libraries based on Mr. J.J. Mensah Kane's paper "Secondary School and Training College Libraries in Ghana, delivered at the-1963 conference in Kumasi was submitted by the Council to the Minister of Education. Following a similar memorandum from the Principal of the Library School, the Minister received a delegation from the Ghana Library Board, the Ghana Library School and the Ghana Library Association. The Minister agreed in principle to the proposal

for the establishment of a School Library Division of the Ministry of Education and also to the setting up of Regional Offices to supervise secondary school libraries. This recommendation remained on paper until 1972 when the School and College Libraries Department was established by the Ghana Library Board to oversee the organisation of libraries in secondary schools and training colleges.

With regard to a possible school libraries section of the Association, the Council decided that "letters should be sent to all secondary schools and training colleges in the country asking those interested in the section to communicate with certain librarians in their regions to be named by the next council which will therefore take up the matter". It is on record that the response was indeed overwhelming but the formation of the section was shortlived.

Mr. Mensah Kane's paper was well received. Although he pointed out that he was speaking as a layman his paper turned out to be professional in content. He was for several years Headmaster of the Ghana National College, Cape Coast and a member of the Council of the Ghana Library Association for two years, perhaps the first and the only non-librarian to have been a full member of the Council.

A special general meeting on salaries was convened by the Coun-

cil on 11th October, 1963 and its recommendations were published in an issue of the Journal. It also generated a lot of correspondence between the Council and the Ministry of Education and the Establishment Secretariat.

The Council was concerned that it was apparently not represented on the Technical Advisory Committee for the National Library for Ghana and approaches were made to the Ministry of Education and to the Director of the Library Board. Happily provision was then made for the Association to be represented.

The Association was admitted as a member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in December, 1963. A request was also received from the IFLA Cataloguing Committee concerning the entry of Ghanaian names in cataloguing.

The number of personal members increased to 91 and there were 35 institutional members.⁷

THE PERIOD 1964-1977

The Presidency rotated in rapid succession amongst the top management staff of the Library Board between the years 1964 to 1977, except for a brief period 1965/67 when Mr. E.Y. Amedekey, of the Balme Library was at the helm of affairs. During this period the

Board based its manpower, material and financial resources in furthering the activities of the Association and of its journal. It must be noted however that this apparent monopoly caused a lot of infighting and jealousy amongst certain sections of the membership. The Editor for a considerable part of this period was also a top official of the Board. Mr. Justice Nii Amaa Ollenu, an eminent jurist and a bibliophile accepted an invitation to be Patron of the Association in 1967.

The Association was honoured to receive Professor Lancour and his wife for a brief visit in 1968. Professor Lancour, who was Dean of School of Librarianship and Information Science, the University of Pittsburg was returning to the U.S. from the School of Librarianship, Ibadan which he had visited as an external examiner. He was kind enough to have accepted an invitation from the Association to stop over in Ghana. He was not a total stranger to Ghana as he had paid an earlier visit in 1957 in connection with the well known Lancour Report on Library Education in West Africa which became the blue print for the Carnegie Corporation's assistance to library education and training in West Africa in subsequent years.

Miss Joan Butler, for several years, Librarian in charge of work with young people in the Hert-

fordshire County Library Service also visited Ghana under the auspices of the British Council, in the same year. She had been on loan to the Ghana Library Board to conduct a seminar for teacher librarians and a workshop for writers of children's books. Members of the Association had the opportunity to meet her and to discuss matters pertaining to librarianship.

Another visitor was professor W.L. Saunders who arrived here in March, 1969 in connection with the possibility of arranging a course for special librarians. He had the opportunity to talk to members of the association.

Another visitor, Miss Ivy Hill of the British Voluntary Services Overseas Organisation, then engaged on library work in secondary schools and training colleges particular in the Ashanti Region also took keen interest in the affairs of the Association.

An elaborate programme was drawn on the occasion of the celebration of International Book Year in 1972. Each member of the association was to adopt one library of his or her own choice in the country and furnish it with professional advice for a period of one week out of the members annual leave.

Seminars on "Problems of Communication between the library and its users" were organised. The

aim was to discuss these problems as they affected university, special and public libraries. Other events included feature articles in local newspapers and journals by members of the association, a TV discussion programme, "periscope" and a conference of West African Library Associations. The theme of this conference was "Book Culture in West Africa" and papers were presented by publishers, librarians, and booksellers. Delegates from Liberia and Nigeria participated in the deliberations. Professor P. Harvard Williams of the Loughborough University of Science and Technology was also received by the Association. He was in Ghana by kind courtesy of the British Council to advise the Department of Library and Archival Studies on curriculum revision and manpower development. He had fruitful discussions with members of the Association.

Professor John Harris replaced Mr. Benge as Head of the Department of Library and Archival Studies. At the 1969 conference Prof. Harris spoke to the delegates on "Manpower Needs for Libraries in Ghana".

By 1969, seven years after its birth, the association had organised five general conferences and two seminars, an average of one a year with attendances averaging about fifty delegates. These were highly successful conferences. Local bran-

ches did not however function properly.

The inaugural meeting of the Commonwealth Library Association (COMLA) took place in Lagos from 21st to 24th November, 1972. A preliminary conference had been held earlier in London in 1971 to discuss the possibilities of forming the COMLA. The Association was represented at both conferences by the President.

Yet another conference of English Speaking Librarians in West Africa was held at the State House in Accra in 1975 by the Library Board in close collaboration with the Association on the occasion of the silver jubilee celebrations of the Board.

THE PERIOD 1977/1983

In the immediate past the Council of the Library Association had been very strong and attempts were made to put the profession on the market. Unfortunately there was a sharp decline between the years 1977 to 1983. It was exceptionally difficult to convene meetings for lack of quorum. Very often members had to travel all the way from up country only to be told that there would be no meeting. It was nothing but frustration.

Also lack of enduring interest did not make regular participation at meetings possible. This was indeed a period of inactivity and stagnation.

Although the association started off well, by 1977 there were a number of problems. These were mainly financial and inadequate commitment of its members and its leadership.

Since 1973 its journal which had achieved world wide circulation and which was supposed to be biannual had not been published although there were a number of articles and papers available. Finance was a major constraint.

Though the Association was still in existence, by the end of 1978 its popularity and influence had waned considerably and imminent signs of its collapse started to show. Despite these problems the "Association" received Mr. K.C. Harrison then President of COMLA in February, 1979. Mr. Harrison, who is well known to several members was on a whirl wind tour of West Africa. He talked to the Association on Recent trends in Librarianship in the UK and also appeared on a local TV discussions programme. His visit was very successful and he was warmly welcomed by all and sundry.

Fortunately the Ghana Book Development Council which had been established in 1975, began to assist the association in several ways. This assistance has mainly been in the form of financial contributions for the association's conferences/congresses, seminars and workshops. The Book Develop-

ment Council has also since 1984 been seeking ways in which it could assist the association to implement some of its programmes especially establishment of school and rural libraries. The Council assisted the association financially in 1988 towards the publication of its Journal.

THE REVIVAL – 1983–1988

In December, 1983 the Association was revived by Mr. A.N. de Heer with generous financial support from the Library Board, the British Council and the Ghana Book Development Council at the British Council Hall in Accra. This meeting was named “a Congress” instead of a “Conference” and this terminology has been used ever since. This Congress discussed library education and training.

At the subsequent Annual General Meeting Mr. J.A. Villars was elected President. This was significant because he was the first Librarian of a special library to have been elected president. Another Special Librarian Mr. D.B. Addo was later appointed Secretary.

The new council organised a number of projects with renewed enthusiasm. Some of the major issues which engaged council's attention included the revival of the journal, registration and membership subscriptions, education and training, forward and strategic planning for the future of the

Association, proposals for a National library and the poor state of libraries in government departments and ministries.

The newsletter was reintroduced in a new and attractive format, through the generosity of Mr. E. Tetteh of the Cocoa Research Institute, Tafo. The publication of the news bulletin was however undertaken by the President with assistance from the Secretary, Mr. D.B. Addo, and Mrs. M.I.S. Boye, a council member .

For the very first time council decided to meet outside its secretariat on an experimental basis. The first meeting in Kumasi was highly successful. The second meeting in Cape Coast was however not so successful. A social evening was also organised for members in Accra. These offered the opportunity for informal discussions among members.

A sub-committee of the Council was set up to (i) look into the question of education and training of library personnel and to make recommendations (ii) to look into the future of non-graduate Diplomates and finally by no means the least to establish guidelines on how to attain professional status. Council also worked on the procedure for institutional membership.

But of considerable importance as far as the future of the association was concerned was the setting up of a 3 man committee chaired

by the President to study a set of proposals submitted by the Secretary. These were concerned mainly with clearly defined goals and objectives. Others included professional development, the association's financial standing, professional standards, ethics and practices, the relationship of the association with other professional bodies, the research role of the association and issues pertaining to honours and awards to be bestowed on deserving members.

As a result of the seminar on a National Library for Ghana, Council appointed a seven man committee to prepare detailed proposals for further study and onward transmission to the appropriate government agency.

The Ghana Library Association was registered as a professional body under the provisions of the professional Bodies Decree NRCD. 143 in . . . 1986. This is a giant leap for the association. However this was not the first time that the recognition of the association had been considered. It will be recalled that in the early days the government recognised the association in Ghana Gazette No.17 of 29th March, 1963. Also in 1971, the Association applied to the Attorney General's Office for registration. At that time the Professional Bodies Registration Bill, 1971 had been passed in Parliament. With this registration the constitution

of the association has been modified to cope with the exigencies of the new regulations. Members for instance will be compelled to pay their subscriptions regularly since non-payment will automatically result in cessation of membership. Another major advantage is that the government is more likely to deal favourably with a professional body which had registered. The association will also be in a better position to exercise a certain measure of control over its members in terms of educational qualifications etc.

The council of the association decided to compile a membership directory. Such a list was of cardinal importance for the registration. It would also help the association to assess its strength and its future manpower needs as it was becoming extremely difficult to identify all persons whose names should appear in the directory. The council took a wise decision in including all staff who possess the certificate of the University of Ghana and above. It was also decided that professional members of the association should pay a higher subscription than the sub-professionals.

A workshop on AACR II was organised in September, 1985. A one day seminar on Information Technology and another one on National Library for Ghana were also organised.

Council took the opportunity to arrange for eminent librarians of international repute visiting Ghana to talk to members of the association. Miss Steprey Ferguson, President of COMLA and Librarian of the Jamaica National Library gave a talk on the COMLA.

Mr. David Claw, Senior Lecturer, School of Library and Information Studies, Queens University, Belfast who was visiting Ghana to advise the Department of Library and Archival Studies on curriculum development and revision also talked to members of the association. Both lectures were well attended.

CONCLUSION

The formal registration of the Association augurs well for the future. There are enormous possibilities as there are educational, sociological economic and industrial changes currently going on in the country. It is clear therefore that the Association has to be re-organised into an effective professional body. There is however a lack of mutual understanding and goodwill among members. Relations between different sections of the profession are less liberal and less cordial than they ought to be.

One hallmark of a professional person is some kind of dedicated and united effort. This is one commodity above all others to knit the membership together into an effective professional force. This

requires individual effort from each member, high or low, — the effort to understand and share in the problems of other types of library than one's own.

Congresses have been highly successful, at least as far as attendances are concerned. But attendance at a congress is not all. Outside these congresses members ought to participate more fully in the affairs of the Association.

For sometime now the organisation of the council's secretariat has been faced with problems. This is due to lack of sufficient and sustained interest and commitment of the membership in the affairs of the council. Also there have been undertones about representation on the council. One possible way of over-coming this problem is to ensure that in future, elections are conducted on "sectional" basis to ensure that, University, Special, Public and School libraries and the Department of Library and Archival Studies are all represented.

In the not too distant future, scientific organisations and research institutes in the country will need librarians with scientific training. The association should therefore look into the possibility of attracting science graduates into the profession. Indeed the profession is facing new challenges to which it has to respond in a positive and completely new way.

Supplementing the congresses has been the publication of the journal which has been recording the activities of the association and has been a forum for the discussion of professional problems. Unfortunately publication has been very irregular. This is due to financial constraints and the association has carried on with its own meagre resources. It is necessary to keep

the journal alive as enquiries have been received from abroad asking whether publication had ceased.

The future of the association lies with the entire membership. Let all members of the association resolve to participate fully in all activities, attend congresses, pay up subscriptions and contribute articles to the Ghana Library Journal.

Past Presidents

- G.M. Pitcher, FLA – 1962/63
- E.K. Koranteng, FLA – 1963/64
- A.G.T. Ofori, FLA – 1964/65
- E.K. Amedekey, B.A. Dip. Lib., FLA – 1965/67
- D.E.M. Oddoye, FLA – 1967/69
- D. Cornelius, FLA – 1969/71
- A.N. de Heer, FLA – 1971/77
- G.C.O. Lamptey, FLA – 1977/83
- J.A. Villars, FLA., MSc – 1983/88
- S. Afre, FLA – 1988

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