

METHODOLOGY REPORT: EAP1366

In this project, the decision was taken by the project team to digitise manuscript evidence from the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. Decisions relating to the selection of volumes during EAP1366 reflected the progress that had been made at the Sierra Leone Public Archives during the earlier projects, EAP443 (<https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP443>) and EAP782 (<https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP782>). Overall, few sources have been digitised from the wealth of twentieth-century evidence held at the Sierra Leone Public Archives. This decision reflects the guidelines of the Endangered Archives Programme.

The evidence digitised during EAP1366 needs to be studied in conjunction with the evidence from the two earlier projects, as well as the pilot project EAP284 (<https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP284>). In these earlier projects, emphasis was placed on digitising Registers of Liberated Africans and associated manuscript sources which documented the release of ‘Liberated Africans’ at Freetown, and their subsequent experiences. In EAP1366, emphasis was placed on digitising sources that related to the governance of the Crown colony, as well as the relationships between colonial officials and Temne, Bullom, Mende, Sherbo and Fula peoples in the colony’s immediate and more distant hinterlands. In the earlier phases of the project, a key priority was to digitise the sources which appeared most at risk. As a result, there is some overlap in the categories of series digitised during the successive EAP projects at the Sierra Leone projects.

The project team for EAP1366 initially planned that 120 volumes would be submitted at the end of the project. The total number submitted was 83 volumes. Several factors explain why the actual number submitted was lower than planned. There was a major delay in the progress of digitisation during EAP1366 due to a burglary at the Sierra Leone Public Archives in March 2022. Equipment was stolen together with hard drives containing all the digitised material that had been captured between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2022. It took several months to order and replace the stolen equipment, and then the team had to spend time replacing the digitised material contained on the stolen hard drives. This was a major setback that significantly affected morale on the project from an early stage. Added to this, the continuing repercussions of COVID affected the work of the team at the Sierra Leone Public Archives. The repercussions of COVID-19 also delayed a visit by the project team to

offer advice and support on the progress of the EAP project. Some volumes were digitised, but not submitted to the British Library. See below:

	Estimated Image Count
Governor's Letter Book, 1 December 1854-23 April 1859	366
Secretary of State's Despatches, 20 January 1849 – 22 November 1849	739
Secretary of State's Despatches, 9 January 1884-5 November 1885	837
Secretary of State's Despatches, 23 April 1880- 31 December 1880	906
Secretary of State's Despatches, 2 January 1889–28 January 1890	1002
Secretary of State's Despatches, 20 July 1878-20 May 1879	1176
Secretary of State's Despatches, 20 December 1875-30 November 1876	891
Secretary of State's Despatches, 9 January 1875-28 December 1876	1054
Secretary of State's Despatches, 23 January 1867-8 April 1873	234
Secretary of State's Despatches, 3 January 1881-19 May 1881	717
Secretary of State's Despatches, 13 July 1868 - 18 December 1868	779
Secretary of State's Despatches, 5 August 1869 -15 March 1870	739
Secretary of State's Despatches, 25 October 1870 - 30 October 1871	1376
Secretary of State's Despatches, 2 January 1882-31 August 1882	533
Secretary of State's Despatches, 22 December 1873-23 December 1874	543
Secretary of State Despatches 2 January 1853 - 20 December 1853	311
Secretary of State's Despatches, 10 September 1877-29 June 1878	1142
Sherbro Letter Book, 1 July-29 December 1885	754
Native Chief Letter Book, 31 August 1882-3 August 1886	400

Following the loss of materials, additional security measures were introduced at the Sierra Leone Public Archives to protect the equipment for digitisation. A decision was also taken that digitised materials would be stored separately from the cameras and laptops.

The problems of sourcing archival materials in Britain to send out by courier to Sierra Leone necessitated a change in planned strategy by the project team. After extensive enquiries with suppliers in Britain, the PI sought advice from the EAP team on how to proceed. It was decided that the severe logistical problems meant that it was pragmatic to use a local supplier of archival materials identified by the Senior Government Archivist at the Sierra Leone Public Archives.

Overall, the project resulted in the submission of 49,360 images based on 83 volumes. This compares to 93 volumes digitised during the previous project (EAP782) which accounted for 43,268 images. The number of images from EAP1366 also significantly exceeds the number digitised during EAP443, although the number of volumes is lower.

Suzanne Schwarz,

Professor of History, University of Worcester.