

EAP474: Regional Archive at Cape Coast, Ghana: pre-colonial and colonial documents preservation project

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2011 award - Pilot project

£6,388 for 9 months

A survey report has been produced, providing details of the training that was received, the methodology for the survey and the general condition of the archives.

The project also digitised a sample of the archives housed at the two repositories that were surveyed; the results can be viewed on the [EAP website](#).

Further Information

You can contact the EAP team at endangeredarchives@bl.uk

ENDANGERED ARCHIVES PROGRAMME

REPORT ON PILOT PROJECT (SURVEY)

EAP 474: “Regional Archive at Cape Coast, Ghana: Pre-colonial and colonial documents preservation project”.

1. SUMMARY OF PROJECT: The pilot project undertook a survey of pre-colonial and colonial collections at the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) in Cape Coast, Ghana. The project assessed the state of preservation of the documents in the specified collections, inventoried them and identified the most endangered of these requiring some technological interventions for protection against further deterioration or total destruction. Sample digitization was done for a few of the endangered records in the course of the project.

2. PROJECT OUTLINE: Training workshop for the project implementation team; record survey of the archive; digitization of selected sample archives to enhance access and improve the quality of the archive.

3. SPECIFIC OUTPUT OF THE PROJECT:

- a. Survey of two major archival repositories of the regional archives
- b. Process and accession all described archives
- c. All fragile and deteriorating archives identified and a sample selection digitized

4. TRAINING AND ORIENTATION: The project commenced on 1 October 2011 and ran for nine months. As a prerequisite for the project, a three-day training and orientation workshop was organized for the research team from 3-5 October 2011. This involved presentations and project site familiarization. The presentations took place at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) Faculty of Arts Conference Room on

October 3rd while the site familiarization was done at the UCC Digital Library on the 4th and the Central Regional Archives, Cape Coast on 5th October.

The Principal Investigator was assisted by The Central Regional Archivist, Mr. Leo Woode, the Digital Librarian at the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Mr. Wilfred. Biney and the Western Regional Archivist, Ms. Priscilla Darkoa Gyimah acted as resource persons. On October 3rd at the Faculty of Arts Conference Room, the Principal Investigator gave a presentation on the nature and scope of the project. The Regional Archivist's presentation was on the situational analysis of the project and this gave a detailed insight into the structure and operations of archives generally and the specific practices as they pertain to the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) in Ghana. The Digital Librarian presented an overview of digitization. On the 4th of October, the team visited the digital section of the UCC Main Library and familiarized itself with the equipment and process of digitization. On 5th October the research team moved to the repositories of PRAAD Central Region at Cape Coast to inspect the state of the collections and the work to be done. Research Assistants from the UCC Department of History and the four members of staff from the archives were briefed on the nature of work for the project.

The training and orientation programme provided basic knowledge for the technical skills required for the survey and digitization. After which, individual project team members were assigned specific roles and were supplied protective clothing (overalls, gloves and masks) for the retrieval and general handling of documents in the repositories. But before the work commenced in earnest, the Regional Archivist organized general cleaning and a light fumigation of the repositories due to the existing conditions.

5. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

A. Record Survey

The methodology adopted for the survey was to conduct a physical inventory of the holdings of the two main repositories:

◆ **Repository No.1** This houses administrative records under the ADM, RG, and CSO groupings according to the PRAAD classification system. The holdings for this repository included a large body of unprocessed archives. They included documents on 14 administrative divisions and subjects:

- a. Nyakrom-Nkum Urban Council
- b. Public Works Department (PWD) Central Region
- c. Nkum Urban Council
- d. Regional Education Office
- e. Cape Coast District Council
- f. Ministry of Agriculture
- g. National Board of Small Scale Industries (NBSSI)
- h. Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) Cape Coast
- i. Maps and Plans
- j. Building permits
- k. District Agricultural Office Winneba
- l. District Office Winneba
- m. Agona Nsaba Local Council
- n. Social Welfare Agona Swedru

- ◆ **Repository No.2.** This houses mainly ADM (administrative), SCT (court records) and Newspaper collections

B. Physical Conditions

- ◆ The files were very dusty, exposed to extreme conditions of weathering and at various stages of deterioration.
- ◆ Storage conditions were far from the ideal.
 - Temperature in the repositories is unregulated. The ideal temperature of 18-22° C by archival standards that can be established at 20°C by air conditioner is unattainable because of the absence of that facility.
 - The problem of lack of temperature regulation is exacerbated by frequent power fluctuation and outages due to rationing. This affected the time that could be spent in the less ventilated repositories because work necessarily had to stop temporarily whenever there was no lighting due to a power outage.
 - Irregular temperature and power supply had had a great toll on paper due to “sweating”.
 - The sorting, arranging, boxing, labeling and shelving of the records caused the research team formidable challenges, but in undertaking these tasks, made a large body of previously unclassified and unorganized archives accessible to researchers for the first time. More importantly, the project made it possible for a large body of documents to be saved from total destruction.

C. Description of work:

- i. On the basis of a professional needs assessment, the Regional Archivist requested that the survey research concentrated on the unprocessed archives which had been lying unclassified and un-accessioned for several decades. The Principal Investigator felt that the Archivist's request was reasonable and agreed to it. The team, therefore, focused on the sorting, arrangement and description of two major un-accessioned record groups. These were arranged, described, accessioned and shelved. These groups were the Nyakrom-Nkum Urban Council, PWD Cape Coast. But some unprocessed newspapers were also processed.
- ii. The two groups of processed records cover the period 1905-1975. The provenances of the records are Nyakrom-Nkum Urban Council and PWD Central Province (now central Region), Cape Coast. Nyakrom and Nkum are two different towns and centres of traditional government. The designation of the council by using the names of two towns was to avoid a dispute that could arise from the inhabitants of an unnamed area regarding themselves as having been unjustly subordinated to a different area by the Central government authorities. There are several local governments (local/urban councils) bearing the names of two or more indigenous political entities (e.g. Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese, Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem etc.). It has been a common occurrence that each time central administration demarcates local government areas and sites capitals, certain people protest the choice of capital if it is not selected from their own localities.
- iii. The content of the records include official correspondence and a miscellany of documents and they are in paper file format. The records were created in the course of the functions of officials of the institutions that created them.

- The Nyakrom-Nkum Urban Council records covering 1905-1975 include correspondence, Stool lands, native affairs, native courts etc.
 - The PWD archives covering the period 1920-1970 were created as the outcome of the performance of the functions of that institution. Its contents include: correspondence between PWD and other institutions; labour issues; monthly reports; quarterly reports; factory inspections; personal files of government employees; Environmental issue-works, community water and sanitation, land reclamation-construction; maintenance.
- iv. The unprocessed archives consisted of huge piles of documents which would take much longer than nine months to process. The Nyakrom-Nkum Urban Council, PWD and Central Region archives surveyed constituted the largest amount of documents. The team was unable to do more as a result of the condition of the repositories. The rooms were too hot for anyone to work in for long periods due to the absence of air-conditioning. The conditions slowed down the rate of work and the work itself was very tiring owing to the reckless manner in which the records had been stored and the long period for which they had not been attended to. Indeed at the end of the survey the Regional Archivist was beside himself with gratitude for the project and wished it had been extended so that all the remaining unprocessed archives could be saved in the same way. There is, however, an urgent need for improving the conditions in the repositories to facilitate work there.
- v. The two groups of records were appraised and classified as the RG series. The series were listed, boxed and shelved.

- vi. They included files on chieftaincy and state affairs, education, information lands and buildings, agriculture, (State farms) industries, labour, health, general correspondence, reports, trade and others, transport and communications.
- vii. ADM and SCT collections
 - The survey also covered archival collections of ADM and SCT classes. The decision to carry out a survey of the ADM record group was because they contain the richest collection with over 262 sub-groups. The ADM 23 series is the largest in the ADM collection. The series covers a wide range of subjects related to the Central Region accumulated at the office of Chief Commissioner (during the colonial period) renamed Regional Administrative Officer after independence .
 - The survey dealt with the ADM 23. Important subjects in this class are related to the problems of land boundaries; land ownership and chieftaincy whose proper functioning is critical to political stability locally and nationally.

D. Digitization

- i. There was a sample digitization of a few of the rapidly deteriorating documents taken from both the newly accessioned and other archives. The sample digitization posed formidable challenges relating to access to equipment and the availability of image quality and standardization control devices. There were some initial difficulties in gaining access to online websites for free checksum applications. It was even more difficult to obtain a colour checker and ruler.
- ii. Selected files had to be taken to the UCC digital library for digitization. The security of the documents could be compromised while in transit and, therefore, the Regional

Archivist was very cautious in releasing files for transportation and digitization at the university. He could allow one or two files to be taken out of the repository and transported to the University library for digitization at one time. This accounted for the rather limited number of material digitized.

- iii. Many of the earliest digital images did not always meet the required standards partly due to the type of the scanner available at the library. The Book Drive Capture scanner initially used was a little bit of an older model. Later when we got the colour checker and access to a more modern flatbed scanner we realized that the bed of the scanner was too small to accommodate the documents, which were generally produced on foolscap size paper, and allow adequate free space for the colour checker. But the focus of the project was surveying the archives and so I think the difficulties encountered in the digitization is for me a learning experience and a preparation for future projects.

6. SCOPE OF WORK DONE

A. Survey

As noted earlier, the conditions in the repositories where the research team worked were far from ideal and this slowed down the pace of work. However, much was achieved to the applause of the Regional Archivist. Surprisingly the Archivist did not have a Desktop computer which could be used for the project and so I had to make adjustments in the project budget to acquire one for the archives.

The survey enabled us to create finding aids for the two groups of unprocessed records. They were catalogued according to Class lists; arranged into Class groups, provided with Class numbers and Class references; identified by covering date record description and records reference numbers. The reference numbers were as much as possible the original reference numbers. The final output of work was as follows:

▪ **PWD CENTRAL REGION, CAPE COAST**

- Covering years: 1929-1970
- Classified as the CRG 13 record group
- Output: 95 archival boxes
- File range: CRG 13/1/1-CRG 13/1/466
- Average file content: 50 paper items
- **Broad outline of subjects covered:** general administration; correspondence between PWD and other institutions; media; reports on labour relations-labour disputes-factory inspection; trade schools; personal files; works-sanitation; land reclamation; quarterly reports; monthly reports; construction and maintenance; electricity; bridge building; tanks and wells.

▪ **NYAKROM-NKUM**

- Covering years: 1905-1975
- Classified as CRG 14 record group
- Output: 154 archival boxes
- File range; CRG 14/1/1-CRG 1/1/959
- Average file content: 50 paper items
- Broad outline of subjects covered: native affairs; stool lands; agriculture (state farms); mining; telecommunications; missionaries and societies; drugs and equipment; health dressing stations; insurance; education

▪ **ADM SERIES**

- The ADM 23 is one of the important groups since it contains records on a wide range of activities of the indigenous people of the central administrative region of the Gold Coast. These records fall under the class of native affairs. The ADM 23 series were records which were accumulated at the office of the political officer in charge of the region.

There have been several changes in the official designation of this position over the years. During the colonial period it was known as the Chief Commissioner of the Central Province. In the early independent period the title of Regional Commissioner was adopted. After the fall of the first republican regime the title was changed to Regional Administrative Officer. Since 1987 the position has been re-designated Regional Coordinating Director.

- The survey involved a “comprehensive audit” of the ADM 23 collection and this revealed serious deterioration in their state of preservation.

B. Sample digitization

The survey found a significant number of documents damaged beyond recovery and the state and pace of deterioration of the archives was disturbing. The files selected and digitized were as follows:

▪ CRG-NYAKROM-NKUM URBAN COUNCIL COLLECTION

Digital folders: CRG 14/1/1- proposals for the introduction of indirect rule into the Gold Coast: 1905-1906; Number of images: 131;

Digital folder CRG 14/1/2: Regional Records, Cape Coast Town Council, 1935-1940; Number of images: 223;

Digital folder: ADM 23/1/1881; Upper Denkyira Local Council elections (1953-1957);

ADM 23/1/13678 Eguafo-Abrem Local Council Minutes (1958-1959); Number of images 36