

Government Publications relating to
Africa in Microform series

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relating to
Sierra Leone,
1808-1961

Introduction to the
microfilm collection
by
David C. Dorward
and
Alan C. Butler

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Government Publications relating to Sierra Leone, 1808–1961

Introduction

This five part series of microfilms of government publications relating to Sierra Leone consists of complete sets of the *Annual Reports*, *Blue Books*, and *Government Gazettes*, from their commencement to independence, each division of the documentation corresponding with a major phase in Sierra Leone administrative history.

The origins of modern Sierra Leone can be traced to the attempts by a group of British businessmen and philanthropists, commonly known as the Clapham Sect, to found a settlement of freed slaves on the Sierra Leone peninsula in 1878. The initial venture was not a success. However, in 1790, the Saint George's Bay Company was formed in an effort to put the scheme on a more business-like basis and in the hope of securing a Royal Charter, which was granted to the renamed Sierra Leone Company the following year, 1791. For the next seventeen years the settlement of Freetown was administered by the Chartered Company, which proved no more commercially viable than its predecessors, eventually going bankrupt. Unfortunately, the Sierra Leone Company, like other British Chartered Companies which operated in Africa, has bequeathed few records and those which survive are outside the terms of reference of this collection.

British colonial rule in Sierra Leone commenced on the 1st January 1808, when the tiny Freetown enclave became a Crown Colony under the direct responsibility of the British government which ruled through a Governor, who was assisted by an advisory Council holding office at the Governor's pleasure. Moreover, the colony also served as the operational base of the British Anti-Slave Trade Squadron and the site of a Vice Admiralty Court (supplanted by a Court of Mixed Commission in 1819) which dealt with accused European slaving ships. In addition, by an Act of Parliament of 1821, all British possessions in West Africa from 20° N. to 20° S. latitude, in substance the British forts and enclaves on the Gambia and Gold Coast, were placed under the authority of the Governor of Sierra Leone. However, owing to the prevailing winds and currents, travel and communications along the coast, being dependent upon sailing ships, were slow and arduous. As Governor Charles Turner remarked in 1825, 'It would be easier for the general officer at Cork to take charge of the Barbadoes than for me to take charge of the three colonies'. Consequently the scheme was abandoned in 1827, the Gambia being granted a large measure of autonomy and the Gold Coast forts being handed over to a council of British merchants.

The first part of the series covers the period from 1808 to 1865. Early nineteenth century Freetown was an urbane settlement by West African standards, possessing amongst other facilities a printing press, used to produce the *Sierra Leone Gazette*, of which sixteen numbers appeared in 1808. The following year Governor Thompson renamed it *The African Herald*. His successor restored the original title but publication ceased shortly thereafter, in 1810. In 1817 it was revived by Governor MacCarthy as *The Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertiser*, part official gazette and part provincial newspaper. Published two or three times per month, it lasted until 1827 when it was discontinued, an economy measure ordered by the Secretary of State.

Though copies of the *Gazette* were forwarded to the Colonial Office, it was primarily intended for the information of the Freetown populace. The *Blue Books*, invaluable research sources, originated from the growing need of the Colonial Office for regular information. In 1819 governors were instructed to submit 'colonial almanacs', the result being a report on the import and export trade of the colony for 1819, as well as lists of "Merchant vessels and burden with invoice of cargo and duty paid at the port of Freetown" for the years 1821 and 1823, and "Returns for Trade and Population of Sierra Leone, 1817-1823", all of which are included in this series. However, in order to obtain more systematic information, in March 1822 the Colonial Office sent each governor a large blue volume containing printed pages for entries under the headings "Abstract of Net Revenue and Expenditure", "Establishment", "Schedule of Taxes, Duties, etc.", "Military Expenditure", and "Schedule of Fees, etc.". The following year headings for "Population", "Imports and Exports", and "Currency" were added to the list of items, which was to increase throughout subsequent years. The first Sierra Leone *Blue Book* to be submitted on these printed forms was that for 1824. Thereafter annual volumes were to appear in an uninterrupted sequence until that for 1943, when the series was discontinued.

Like the *Blue Books*, the *Annual Reports* stemmed from the demand for increased information regarding the colonies, in particular from the recommendations of the 1845 House of Commons' Select Committee on Colonial Accounts, as a result of which colonial governors were instructed to render annual reports for submission to Parliament. The first *Annual Report* for Sierra Leone was that for 1846.

Part two of the series encompasses the years 1866 to 1895. In 1866, as a direct result of the Report of the 1865 Parliamentary Select Committee on West Africa, the Gambia, Gold Coast, and recently acquired colony of Lagos were united under the Governor of Sierra Leone, styled Governor-in-Chief of

the West African Settlements. Yet, despite the availability of faster and more reliable steamships, centralized control once again proved impractical. Hence Lagos and the Gold Coast were separated from Sierra Leone and the Gambia in 1874. The Gambia did not gain separate colonial status until 1888. Unfortunately the demands upon the Governor, especially during the years when he was also in charge of the West African Settlements, and sickness amongst his already overworked officials led to lapses in the presentation of *Annual Reports*. None was received for the years 1865, 1874, 1877 to 1879 and 1883 to 1886, while a combined report was submitted for the years 1881 and 1882. The *Annual Report* for 1880 contains comparative statistics and data for the years 1876 to 1880, while that for 1887 includes some information for the years 1885 to 1887. On the other hand, production of the *Blue Books* was unaffected, while *The Sierra Leone Royal Gazette* recommenced on the 31st January 1870, appearing as a monthly until June 1892 when it became a weekly.

Meanwhile, the Colony of Sierra Leone was becoming increasingly involved, both politically and economically, in the affairs of the hinterland and adjacent coastal areas; as illustrated in the *Blue Books*, trade, first in timber and later in groundnuts, palm oil, and palm kernels, flourished. Yet the extent of Sierra Leone's hinterland remained a matter of dispute until 1895, when an agreement was finally signed between Britain and France defining the modern boundaries of Sierra Leone, the border with Liberia having been settled some years earlier. The following year, on the 31st August 1896, this British sphere beyond the confines of the Colony, *per se*, was proclaimed a Protectorate.

Though the Governor of the Colony was also Governor of the Protectorate, the systems of administration in the two territories were quite distinct. In 1863 the old Governor's Council had been replaced by Executive and Legislative Councils, the latter including appointed 'unofficial' representation. Until the constitutional reform of 1924, however, the Protectorate was administered exclusively through an executive bureaucracy of Secretariat officials and District Commissioners directly responsible to the Governor, deliberations of the Executive and Legislative Councils were confined to matters affecting the Colony. In 1924, in a tentative step toward greater integration of the Colony and Protectorate, the terms of reference of the Executive and Legislative Councils were extended to include the Protectorate. In addition, the composition of the Legislative Council was expanded to include twelve official members, including the Governor, and ten unofficial members, the latter consisting of three elected Africans and two appointed Africans from the Colony, three nominated Chiefs ostensibly representing the Protectorate, and two representatives of the "commercial, banking and

general European interests, one of these being appointed on recommendation of the Chamber of Commerce”.

Part Three of the series covers the years from the proclamation of the Protectorate in 1896 to 1923; Part Four from 1924, the year of constitutional reform, to the end of the Second World War in 1945; Part Five, the final segment in the series, encompassing the post-war period of 'decolonization', from 1946 to independence in 1961. Only a few comments need to be made regarding the documentation. The *Annual Reports* were not published during the war years 1939 to 1945, inclusive. The *Annual Reports* were revived in 1946, though in a new 'colonial development' public relations guise. They were finally discontinued in 1958, three years before independence, by which time they had become something of an anachronism. As already noted, the series of Blue Books ended in 1943, though the Government Gazette continued publication to independence.

Government Publications Relating to Sierra Leone, 1808–1961

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Group One 1808–1865

- Reel 1 The Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Colonial Accounts: Appendix No.5: Estimated Revenue and Expenditure of the Government of Sierra Leone for the year 1843.

Annual Reports 1846–1848

Annual Reports 1850–1864

No separate report was submitted for 1849, though a much expanded combined Annual Report for 1849 and 1850 was presented as Command Paper Number 1421. Regarding the Annual Report for 1865 the printed Command Paper bears the notation "Not Received".

Blue Books 1824–1830

The series of Blue Books is prefaced by the following documents:

(a) Official Statement of Exports and Imports for Sierra Leone, 1819

(b) List of Merchant Vessels and burden with invoice of cargo and duty paid at the port of Freetown, 1821

(c) List of Merchant Vessels and burden with invoice of cargo and duty paid at the port of Freetown, 1823

(d) Return for Trade and Population of Sierra Leone, 1817–1823

(e) Abstract from returns laid before Parliament, 5 July 1825.

Reel 2 Blue Books 1831–1837

Reel 3 Blue Books 1838–1844

Reel 4 Blue Books 1845–1851

Reel 5 Blue Books 1852–1856

Reel 6 Blue Books 1857–1861

Reel	7	Blue Books	1862—1865
Reel	8	Government Gazette	1808—1810
		Government Gazette	1817—1828

Sixteen issues of the Sierra Leone Gazette appeared in 1808, these being numbers 1 to 11 and 16 to 20. A copy of the Sierra Leone Gazette, No. 16, Saturday, 8 October 1808, in Hull University Library bears a notation by Governor T. Perronet Thompson:- "Nos. 12, 13, 14, 15 never published". Eleven copies of The African Herald were published during 1809, as well as an extraordinary No. 10 of 11 November 1809, printed by Governor Thompson lampooning his critics. The latter was never published and should not be confused with the official No. 10 of 25 November 1809. Only three copies of the Sierra Leone Gazette appeared in 1810 before publication ceased. The Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertiser commenced publication on 2 August 1817 and continued until 1827. It is consecutively numbered throughout.

Group Two 1866–1895

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No Annual Reports were submitted for 1874, 1877 to 1879, 1881, per se, and 1883 to 1886. A combined report was presented for 1881 and 1882, Command Paper Number C. 4015. The Annual Report for 1880 contains comparative statistics and analysis for the period 1876 to 1880, while that for 1887 includes some information for the period 1885 to 1887.

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