

## SOAS Special Collections Guides:

### Missionary Sources Relating to Africa

*This guide offers an overview of archives and published sources relating to missionary activity in Africa held at SOAS Library and elsewhere*

#### Missionary Sources

SOAS is a major centre for the study of the Western missionary movement and its interaction with the peoples of Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the West Indies.

SOAS Library holds an estimated 750,000 original documents, some 70,000 photographs and many thousands of published works comprising histories, memoirs, annual reports, missionary magazines, bible translations and hymnals.



*Khama III, Chief of the Bamangwato and Sir Albert Spicer, London Missionary Society Treasurer, in Serowe, Bechuanaland Protectorate [Botswana], 1907*

Research sources can be divided into two categories: archives or *primary source* material, and published or *secondary source* material

Missionary collections provide some of the earliest documentation of contact with overseas communities, their first recorded histories and often the first forms of written language as they attempted to translate the Bible and other works into the local vernacular. They are a rich source for the social, medical, educational and political history of these regions.

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## Primary Sources: Archives

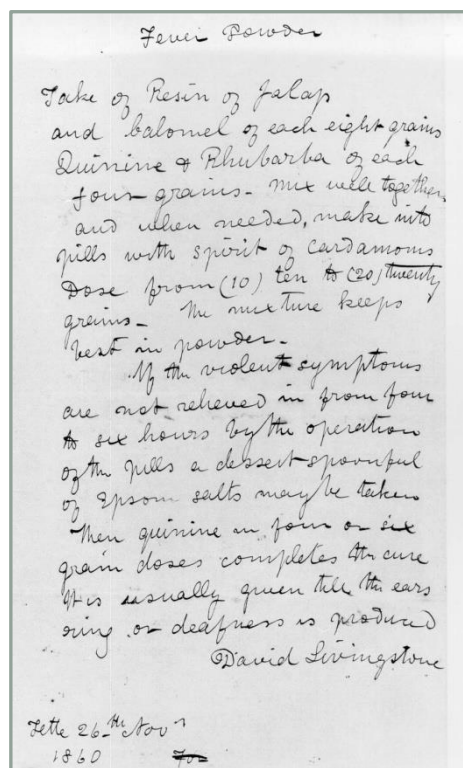
The archives of missionary societies are a great source of information since missionaries were expected to send regular letters and reports on their progress to the mission headquarters and these have survived to a large extent.

## Missionary Archives at SOAS

Lists of archives and manuscript collections can be consulted in the Special Collections Reading Room, and many of the archive collections have also been catalogued on-line at <http://archives.soas.ac.uk/CalView/>

However, be aware that the on-line catalogue is not fully comprehensive yet, and will often need to be supplemented by reference to the hard copy catalogues in our Reading Room.

The main missionary organisations relating to Africa whose archives are held at SOAS are listed on the following pages.



**'The Zambezi Rouser', fever cure by David Livingstone, London Missionary Society, 1860**

## Conference of British Missionary Societies/ International Missionary Council (IMC/CBMS)

The following is a summary of the main series that comprise this collection

Please note, although there is a wealth of material held in this collection, it suffers from a lack of comprehensive cataloguing and is therefore not that easy to use. Over the next few years we hope to improve access to the collection, but its substantial size means that this will be a slow job.

- **Joint CBMS/IMC Archives**

These relate to co-operative missionary endeavours in Africa from 1910-1945.

135 boxes

- **Conference of British Missionary Societies (now the Conference for World Mission) Archives 1912-1960**

Minutes and papers of the standing committee, the Home Council its committees; area files; files on literature and medical work and files on contacts with other missionary bodies.

621 boxes

- **International Committee on Christian Literature for Africa (ICCLA)**

Founded in 1929 as the Christian Literature Bureau it became, in 1953, part of the International Missionary Council. In 1957/8 its operations were transferred to Africa. Minutes, accounts, correspondence and reports dated c.1920-1957 and sets of works published.

45 boxes



*Building the first church in the Liendwe Valley, Northern Rhodesia [Zambia], c.1900.*

### ***Council For World Mission Incorporating the London Missionary Society and Commonwealth Missionary Society (CWM/LMS, CWM/CMS)***

By far the largest collection held at SOAS and the most heavily used, these archives, dated 1795-1970, relate to the work of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the South Seas, Australia, Papua New Guinea, South East Asia, China, Southern and Central Africa, Madagascar, India, the West Indies and to a lesser extent in North America and Europe.

The collection includes minutes, correspondence, reports, personal papers, an estimated 30,000 photographs and a number of collections of personal papers.

It also comprises records of the Commonwealth Missionary Society, formerly the Colonial Missionary Society, which worked in Australia, North America, New Zealand, South Africa and the West Indies.  
**c. 3,000 boxes**

### ***Methodist Missionary Society (MMS)***

The archives (1798-1955) document the work of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, the United Methodist Missionary Society, and the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society in Europe, North America, and the West Indies, Africa, India, Burma, Sri Lanka and Australia. The societies united in 1933 to form the Methodist Missionary Society.

**1,400 boxes**

Please note that only archives up to 1945 are open to researchers and that the material is only available on microfiche.

### ***United Society For Christian Literature Incorporating the Religious Tract Society (USCL)***

The Society's archive contain the surviving records of the Religious Tract Society, founded in 1799, and the Christian Literature Society for India and Africa, founded in 1858 as the Christian Vernacular Education Society for India, and include minutes, letter books, miscellaneous papers, reports 1799-1976. Very little original correspondence survives and there are gaps in publications held.

**370 volumes, 40 boxes**

### ***Missionary Personal Papers***

There are a considerable number of private collections of missionaries from various societies or operating as independents, which have either been deposited separately or are



*Portrait of Rev. William Napoleon Barleycorn, African PMMS missionary, Fernando Po [Bioko]. c.1880.*



kept with the archives listed above. Papers of missionaries working in Africa include those relating to Dora Earthy, Thomas Birch Freeman, Andrew Hake, J. T Hardyman, David Livingstone, Albert Lock, William Millman, Robert Moffat, John Philip, Charles Richards, Margaret Sabin, Alexander Sandilands, James Sibree, Mabel Shaw, Isaiah Shembe, Edwin Smith, Kenneth Maltus Smith and John Thomson.

### ***Locating other Missionary Archives relating to Africa***

The Mundus Gateway to Missionary Collections enables researchers to locate the archives of missionary societies across the UK. To search the database go to <http://www.mundus.ac.uk>. A regional search using the 'maps' facility will help in narrowing down those collections held at SOAS and other institutions that relate specifically to Africa, or regions within Africa.



***Compounder in the medical dispensary, Ilesha MMS Hospital, Osun, Nigeria***

You may also find these publications useful:

- *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues* ed. by Robert A. Bickers and Rosemary Seton [see Appendix], Curzon Press, 1996.
- *British Archives* (3rd ed) Janet Foster and Julia Sheppard, Macmillan, 1995

The missionary archives on the following page are particularly substantial and may be useful to your research on Africa:

### ***Baptist Missionary Society***

Archives held at: Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Pusey Street, Oxford OX1 2LB

- *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992* by Brian Stanley, Edinburgh, 1992.

### ***Church Missionary Society***

Archives held at: University of Birmingham Library, Special Collections, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT

SOAS holds a number of finding aids to the CMS archive:

- *Register of Missionaries from 1804-1904*
- *Missionary Registers 1813-55* (chiefly CMS)
- *Church Missionary Intelligencer 1864-93* (incomplete)

### ***United Society For The Propagation Of The Gospel and Universities' Mission To Central Africa***

Archives held at: Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies, Rhodes House, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3RG

### ***British & Foreign Bible Society***

Archives held at: Cambridge University Library, West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DR

### ***Scottish Foreign Missions (Church of Scotland, United Free Church of Scotland, Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church)***

Archives held at: The National Library of Scotland, Manuscripts Division, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EW

- National Library of Scotland, *Catalogue of MSS, Vol VI, Scottish Foreign Mission Records 1827-1929*.

## Secondary Sources: Published Works

Published secondary sources can often be the best starting point for researching the history of a particular region of missionary work, mission station or missionary, providing context and orienting the researcher before they attempt to locate specific sources archival collections. Types of published material to consider will include mission histories and other published accounts, annual reports and periodicals.

## Mission Libraries at SOAS

SOAS holds two large and important mission libraries, which were deposited along with the archives. The **Council for World Mission Library** comprises c.13,000 books, pamphlets, serials and a small selection of manuscripts. The **Methodist Missionary Society Library** comprises c.7,500 books and pamphlets.

In addition to histories, biographies, reports and periodicals of the societies, they contain material on all aspects of Christian mission in addition to the geography, history, natural history, anthropology, religion, philosophy, language, literature, science and medicine of the peoples with whom the missionaries were in contact.



*The London Missionary Society printing press, Antananarivo, Madagascar, c.1930*

The collections also contain translations, dictionaries and grammars, and the earliest imprints of many Asian, African and Pacific languages. For some languages these missionary publications provide the only known record.

Both libraries have been largely listed on the Library's on-line catalogue at <https://library.soas.ac.uk/>. For a complete list, select 'Classmark' and then type in either 'CWML\*' or 'MMSL\*') into the search field. Searches can be refined by keyword, and can also be searched using the subject index.

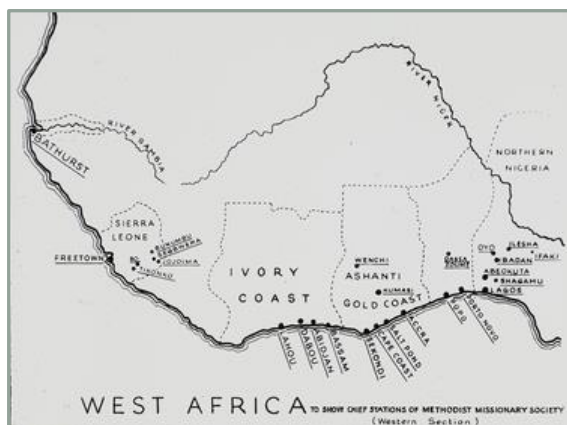
## Mission Histories

SOAS has copies of histories for many of the major missionary society collections held here, which detail historical developments by geographical region. The most useful of these include those for the London Missionary Society and Methodist Missionary Society:

- *The History of the London Missionary Society, 1795-1895* by Richard Lovett, London, 1899 ( 2 vols).
- *History of the London Missionary Society 1895-1945* by Norman Goodall, OUP, 1954. Lists missionaries working between 1895-1945 but without biographical details.
- *Gales of Change: The Story of the London Missionary Society 1945-77* ed. by Bernard Thorogood, London, 1994.
- *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* by G.C. Findlay and W.W.Holdsworth, 5 vols. London, 1921

## Annual Reports

Complete sets of annual reports for the London Missionary Society, Colonial Missionary Society, and the various elements of the Methodist Missionary Society (Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodists) are available in the Special Collections Reading Room. These volumes are a useful starting point for the study of missions for specific regions at



**Map of the chief mission stations of the WMMS in West Africa, 1926**

particular times. In addition to giving a summary of the work of the missionary society for that year, including financial and statistical information, the reports give a report for each individual mission station in each region, often with the names of the missionaries working at that station and sometimes numbers of local preachers, teachers, evangelists and converts.

### Periodicals

Most of the missionary societies published monthly periodicals containing lengthy extracts from letters and reports. These are bound into indexed annual volumes and are invaluable as a source of information on society activities, on progress in the mission stations and on the movements of individual missionaries. Many of these publications can be consulted in the Special Collections Reading Room; others are available by requisition from the mission libraries. Full details of these can be found on the Library's on-line catalogue at <https://library.soas.ac.uk/>.

### Biographical Sources

You may want to find out more information about individual missionaries and converts. Most of the more accessible information concerns European missionaries, though you may also be able to find material relating to indigenous pastors, teachers and bible women. We are currently working on a guide to *Finding your missionary ancestors* which will be made available on the Web shortly.

### Contact Details

Special Collections Reading Room  
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London  
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