

# AFRICA 2009

DOCUMENTATION AND INVENTORY  
OF  
IMMOVABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE:

THE SIERRA LEONE SITUATION  
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TRAINEE LIBRARIAN

SIERRA LEONE NATIONAL MUSEUM

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## **ABSTRACT**

The need for the preservation of Ancient, Historical and national monuments, relics and other objects of Archaeological, Ethnological, Historical or other scientific interest was recognized in Sierra Leone as far back as 1947 through the enactment of the Monuments and Relics Ordinance (1<sup>st</sup> June 1947).

Political independence in April 1961 from Britain bequeathed the newly established Sierra Leone government with vast amounts of records on virtually every aspect of colonial administration. However, 39 years of independence have not impacted much on the lives of ordinary citizens as witnessed by the following indicators:

- The Sierra Leone National Museum opened its doors in 1957 and remains the only museum in the country.
- Culture has never featured as a high government priority. Hence, low financial allocation for the museum, its staff and equipment (e.g. no fax or computer)
- Establishing a library, a step forward in the documentation and inventory of immovable cultural heritage, was commissioned on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2000.

## **KEY WORDS IN CONTEXT**

**Dr. M.C.F. Easmon**- The founder of the Sierra Leone National Museum and the first chairman of the Monuments and Relics Commission

**MENDE** - The largest ethnic group in Sierra Leone

**Connaught Hospital** - The main Public Hospital in Sierra Leone

**Krios** -They consisted of the Nova Scotians, Maroons And liberated Africans.

**Mabang** - A small town immediately out of the capital city, Freetown.

**City Hall** - Town Council

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Immovable Cultural Property in any country is mostly comprised of monuments, archaeological sites and rock paintings. There are eighteen declared monuments in Sierra Leone and an abundance of archaeological sites. At first the movable and immovable cultural property had not been protected. A lot of ethnographic material for example was taken abroad during the colonial period and monuments fell into decay.

There has always been an awareness that this rich cultural heritage should be protected from thieves, smugglers and vandals and be preserved for posterity. The late **Dr. M.C.F. Easmon** was largely responsible for the first legislation of this kind and for the formation of the monuments and relics commission of which he was the first chairman. The monuments and relics ordinance of 1<sup>st</sup> June 1947 provides the basis for the protection and preservation of ancient, historical and natural monuments, relics and other objects of archaeological, ethnological and historical or other scientific interest.

Most of these sites bear the imprint of centuries of human activity. Sadly however, these cultural monuments and natural sites appear to be threatened principally by degradation and neglect. Therefore, there is a dire need to manage our cultural resources carefully and in the appropriate method.

Unfortunately Sierra Leone has gone through a decade old war that has devastated the politico, socio and economic life of its people. The war has also caused extensive damage not only to the monuments and relics in Sierra Leone and other immovable cultural heritage but also has affected the general upkeep of monuments and relics in Sierra Leone.

It is hoped that in the near future, with the advent of peace, these structures will be effectively exploited for their educational, social and cultural values and be preserved for posterity.

## **BACKGROUND OF SIERRA LEONE**

Sierra Leone the mother of the West African colonies, neither the least nor the youngest of the possessions of the British crown and boasting a history whose romantic nature, few colonies can equal and none can surpass, dates back to 1462 when it was discovered by the Portuguese sailor Pedro De Cintra. . Sierra Leone was the first country to more or less throw aside slavery. It had the Court of Mixed Commission who tried owners of slave ships since 1807 in Freetown. The Sierra Leone post office now stands in this site.

Sierra Leone is a country with a temperature averaging eighty degrees Fahrenheit or twenty-six degrees centigrade. It has two seasons, which are the rainy season and the dry season. The dry season lasts from November to April and the rainy season from May to October. It is a land of tropical seas, fantastic beaches and a rich culture taking many forms.

According to oral history, Sierra Leone has a rich culture dating from the time when our ancestors settled in their respective areas, archaeological sites dating from the time when small bands of nomadic hunters and gatherers roamed the savannah uplands of the north. Natural life belonging to a stretch on the west coast, coastal belts a diversity of ethnic groups and languages each with its own folklore, a wealth of secret societies and associated cultural materials, traditional crafts that have been inherited to generations and monuments and relics which still stand to commemorate the people and events of the more recent past.

### **BACKGROUND OF THE MONUMENTS AND RELICS COMMISSION**

There has long been the awareness of the need to preserve the cultural heritage of our country. In response to this need, a monuments and relics commission was later set up on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1947 through the promulgation of an ordinance. The monuments and relics ordinance of the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1947 provides for the 'preservation of ancient historical and natural monuments, relics and other objects....'The commission shall be a body having perpetual succession and a common seal and capable in law of suing and being sued in it's corporate name and subject to the provisions of this ordinance of acquiring, holding and hiring property of movable and immovable cultural property, although there has always been the need to preserve the cultural heritage for the education and enlightenment of present and future generations. Progress has been slow with little or no interest and left largely to the effort and enthusiasm of individuals notably **Dr. M.C.F. Easmon** who was the inspiration behind the first legislation and the museum in Sierra Leone. This body was mandated to act as a supervisory body for the museum and the monuments and relics. But in the amendment Act of 1967 of the Sierra Leone museum, it was mandated that a separate body known as the museum community and the monuments and relics commission board was to be set up and must have board members consisting of not over twelve members.

### **TYPES OF IMMOVABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SIERRA LEONE**

Sierra Leone is rich in Archaeological sites. Some date to the Stone Age in Africa. Not much Archaeological work has been done in Sierra Leone. A few Archaeologists have conducted excavations e.g. Carlton Coon who excavated the Yengema cave in 1967 and John Atherton the Rock Shelters of Kamabai and Yagala in 1968 and 1969 and Mathew Hill in 1969. Tom Newman came to Sierra Leone on an archaeological reconnaissance in 1962 and in 1966, so did Paul Ozanne. Donald Roll did Surface collection and so did Dr. Decorse at Bunce Island. Their findings were well documented in their reports to their departments and also published in the West African Journal of Archaeology in West Africa.

There are to date eighteen declared monuments. There are many more that have been identified and a proposal forwarded to the government for ratification.

## **BUNCE ISLAND**

Bunce Island can be compared to the Cape Coast Castle of Ghana and the Goree Island in Senegal.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile long and 300 yards wide it is one of the smaller islands in the Sierra Leone River and situated at the confluence of three important waterways. It is at the limit of navigability for ocean going vessels. This island played an important role in the early history of the Sierra Leone River in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries before the formation of the Sierra Leone Company and the beginning of Sierra Leone as we know it today. It was successively a general trading factory concentrating mainly on slave - trade.

It later on became a definite slave depot, a timber ware house and later on a recruiting station for the British army in West Africa.

In 1664, Holland and Great Britain were at war and the famous Dutch Admiral, De Ruyter sailed to West Africa to destroy British settlements. The abolition of the slave trade in 1807 however ended profitable commerce for the island.

Substantial impressive remains of the buildings still stand today and the whole layout can be seen, walls and bastions with many cannons still lying in position. The main residential block stores the powder magazine and the slave quarters.

In 1948, when it was proclaimed a national monument, Bunce Island started to attract visitors. Museum excursions were made during the dry season up till the eighties when sea craft was more readily available. This island has very high touristic potential and has been sponsored by a private establishment; namely, Yazbec tours and the National Tourist board. Black Americans especially the Gullahs from South Carolina, Georgia have linked themselves to this monumental place. 14 members of the Moran family from Georgia in 1997 came to see Bunce Island and reunite with their long lost relations whom they got to know about through a **Mende** song. This song the Moran's knew on the other side through research done by an American anthropologist, Joseph Opala in Sierra Leone who traced the root of this song to be in Mende land.

However, the government of Sierra Leone has not really tapped into these great resources yet. Nevertheless, plans are on the way on both sides (i.e. United States and Sierra Leone) to re-activate this unique chain, when sustainable peace is once more experienced in Sierra Leone.

## **THE DE RUYTER STONE**

This is Freetown's oldest monument. It lies buried 6 feet underground just above the high water mark at the king Jimmy market near the **Connaught Hospital**. Admiral De Ruyter recaptured Goree and then descended upon Sierra Leone and in 1664 after obtaining water and supplies, disabled and pillage the English factory on **Tassoh Island** as punishment for the ill treatment of some Dutch settlers whose goods had been seized.

An interesting record of De Ruyters expectation to Sierra Leone was disclosed in April 1923 at king Jimmy Wharf, Freetown. During the progress of some engineering works a

large rock was exposed on which was inscribed, amongst other Dutch and English names, the following;

M.A. RUITER I. C. MEPPEI  
VICE- ADMIRALEN  
VAN HOLLANT  
EN WESTVRIES  
LANT A.D. 1664

After inspection in 1923, the stone was reburied as protection against vandalism and weathering. It has then been uncovered every ten years 1948,1958,1968,1978,1987 for inspection and re-buried waiting the time when finances will be available to erect a permanent building over it which will allow viewing as well as protection.

### **THE BASTIONS OF FORT THORTON**

The fortifications of Smiths Hill now known as Tower Hill were built from 1792 to 1805. Inside the fort were the governor's house, government offices such as the post office and the barracks for the garrison. When these buildings were being reconstructed to make way for State House the present day building, the monuments thought it necessary to have the bastions proclaimed a national monument so as to incorporate them into the new building. Fort Thornton is in very good repairs but much restored form than its original state. Several strategically placed cannons remind one of the original purpose of the fortress. Unfortunately these cannons have been painted white, thus destroying their natural beauty and perhaps their value as relics.

### **THE REMAINS OF THE EARTH WORKS**

Masakpaidu is an abandoned village in Kono in Nimmi Yema chiefdom and was one of several villages in the region in pre-protectorate days. This fortified village of Masakpaidu dates back to about 1800. The depth of the ditch is now 6ft below ground level on the other side and then distance to the top ramp of the outer wall is 9ft. The width is about 12ft. There were originally 2 entrances to the stockade with poles placed across the entrance to form a bridge. These were taken up at night or when an attack was expected. This village was finally abandoned when the Sofas under Alimamy Samory around 1893, sacked it. It was declared a national monument in 1949.

### **OLD WHARF STEPS**

These are the steps between the old lower commissariat and the French company building today now the Electoral Commission and the City Council. They are often referred to as the Portuguese steps. They were built by the order of Governor, Sir, Charles McCarthy in 1818, with the guardhouse at the top being built in 1819.

### **THE GATE WAY TO THE OLD KINGS YARD**

After the abolition of the slave trade in 1808, ships in the British navy, which plied the Atlantic, were largely employed in the suppression of the slave traffic to the West Indies and the Americas.

Rescued slaves were landed at King Jimmy wharf and taken into a compound in which they were temporarily housed. This became known as the king's yard and through this passed the immediate ancestors of nearly all the present day **krios**.

The gateway to the king's yard now leading to a part of the Connaught Hospital in Freetown is an impressive piece of architecture with an inscription recording its purpose on a slab over the arch dated 1819.

The inscription reads,

ROYAL ASYLUM AND HOSPITAL FOR AFRICANS  
RESCUED FROM SLAVERY BY BRITISH VALOUR  
AND PHILANTHROPY.

Some famous people like Samuel Adjai Crowther the first African Bishop 1863-1891 of the Anglican community and John Ezzidio, the first African elected member of the legislative council passed through the king's yard.

### **THE RUINS OF JOHN NEWTONS HOUSE AND THE SLAVE BARRACOONS ON PLANTAIN ISLAND**

A certain captain first occupied Plantain Island by the name of John Plantain. It is believed that this island got its name from him and not from the presence of the plantain groves. John Newton the son of a captain in the mercantile was born in London in 1725 and died in 1807.

After leaving the sea and the slave trade he continued his religious studies and became the curate at Olney Bucks in England. It was here he became a friend of Cowper the poet and collaborated with him on the Olney Hymns. Newton will best be remembered by posterity as a hymn writer. He wrote about six hymns but some of his best are Amazing Grace on which he referred to himself as the soul that was lost and then found again.

### **THE CLEVELAND TOMBSTONE**

The Cleveland tombstone was erected on the grave of the original James Cleveland who came out to Sierra Leone as a slave trader the same time as the first Skinner Caulker about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The tombstone is equal to that of Bunce Island but it is in a much better state of preservation. The only damage being a clean break across caused by a tree having fallen across it. The stone bears the inscription;

Sacred to the memory of Mr. James Cleveland and  
Late proprietor of this island who departed this life  
March 24<sup>th</sup> 1791 in his 37<sup>th</sup> year of his age. His  
Surviving relative William Cleveland has caused  
This stone to be placed over his grave as a tribute to the

Memory of a worthy man.

### **NOMOLI**

Nomoli are steatite or soapstone figures and are peculiar to the **Mende** land. Nothing is known about its origin but it is claimed that God made them. Nomoli are found singly when a piece of land is being cleared for farming. Due to its crouched position it is believed that they were ancestral figures. Presently, they are used as fertility figures. The nomoli is of unknown antiquity and their export is prohibited.

### **THE ORIGINAL FOURAH BAY COLLEGE BUILDING**

This building is a massive four-storey building of dressed blocks of laterite. The building was finished in 1848 after three years work. It housed the Christian institution in 1876 and was the first university college for blacks. It was in use until the Second World War when the college was transferred to **Mabang**. At present it is now in ruins.

### **THE VICTORIAN FIREPLACE**

It was declared a national monument in 1961. It was earlier referred to as the Waterloo house, which was one of Freetown's oldest houses. The fireplace was destroyed when the houses were either demolished or altered. Present day **City Hall** is currently occupying the site.

### **THE GRAVE OF CAPTAIN LENDY AT WAIIMA, KONO DISTRICT**

It was here at Waiima that the British and French forces who were allies fired accidentally on each other while pursuing samory sofa warriors. Captain Lendy on the side of the British and lieutenant Maritz on the French side were killed. Captain Lendy was buried on the spot. A new and larger memorial in 1933 was erected incorporating the original cross.

### **HEDDLES FARM**

This was the site of a house, which commanded a fine view over Freetown. It is found on the old Leicester road and dates from 1820. This residence is now in ruins. This farm was the property of many notable citizens before passing finally in 1859 to the honorable Charles Heddle, a leading businessman and pioneer in the groundnut trade. Until it was abandoned it was in turn a private residence; the country residence of the governor; a convalescent home and the home of some commissionaire judges.



### **THE OLD MILITARY BUTTS**

The old Military Butts of the rifle range of the military forces are the remains of a large military establishment that served British West Africa. However, this monument has been converted into a modern dwelling house.

### **THE MARTELLO TOWER AT TOWER HILL NEAR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

The Martello Tower is similar to those, which were built along the south coast of England as protection against possible attacks by Napoleon Bonaparte. Governor Day in 1805 built the Martello tower in Freetown.

### **SAINT JOHN MAROONS CHURCH**

ST. John Maroon Church is a small white building in the colonial architectural style. It is not only one of the oldest places of worship (it is not the oldest church) but the only one named after one of the three original groups of settlers of the colony: the Maroons, who arrived in 1800. The church was erected round about 1820 on land given as a government grant.

The Maroons were the third group of original settlers in Freetown. The preservation of this building in perpetuity, has ensured that the term Maroon` will not go into oblivion as did `Maroon Town` for example.

### **SAINT CHARLES CHURCH AND REMAINS OF THE KING'S YARD WALL**

ST. Charles church is the oldest stone church in Sierra Leone and the third oldest in Africa. Rev. J.B. Johnson built it a few years after Sierra Leone became a crown colony. This was the place where immediately on arrival the liberated Africans were set free and maintained by the liberated African department until they could be settled. There is also a small portion of the king's yard wall still standing.

### **PUNISHMENT FOR WILFUL DESTRUCTION OF MONUMENTS AND RELICS**

Any person guilty of an offence shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine of one hundred pounds or in default of payment be imprisoned for a minimum of six months. Such persons shall be defacers, destroyers, transgressors and also sellers. Any unlawful drawing or photograph is also prohibited.

### **DOCUMENTATION OF MONUMENTS AND RELICS**

We can only boast of a few documents. We have some notes written by **Dr. M.C.F. Easmon** and **Mrs. Dorothy Cummings** (former curators of the Sierra Leone National Museum). Reports of archaeologists who did surface collections and excavations in Sierra Leone are forms of documentation which were done. These reports can be found

in the universities of the various scholars. These copies were printed in Ibadan, Nigeria and copies were sent to the university of Sierra Leone, Fourah Bay College.

It is revealed that though the monuments and relics commission has developed to some extent, it is however beset with a number of developmental problems. Chief among which is inadequate government support, lack of finances and the general ignorance of the public as to its role in society.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD**

There is a need for urgent training of staff. We cannot even boast of professional graduates notably architects, archaeologists, anthropologists, ethnographers, etc who could man this body effectively. In terms of leadership, there is the need for a leadership with a high cultural awareness and technical skill who would be ever willing to spend his/her time in the field. The monuments and relics commission must revisit and review its ordinance of 1967 to conform to modern realities. This ordinance must be seen as the key charged with protecting cultural property and government legislation must be drafted to back this mandate. Acquisition of the necessary office equipments example; fax, computers, are lacking. Better remuneration, in order to attract qualified personnel; we can take for example the salary of the curator which is not up to \$50 per month.

The monuments and Relics Commission must look into the problems of various sites as sites are fastly falling into decay or being stolen. Heddles Farm is a typical example; Dr. Dalton Faulkner a patriot of the University of Sierra Leone reported on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September that Heddles Farm is being sold by the Survey and Lands Department of Sierra Leone. He emphasized that this property was bought from Mr., Heddle in 1878 and proclaimed an ancient monument by Public notice No. 98 of September 1948. He said that of the 50 acres of land only ten is now remaining. The rest has been sold. Certain sites too are being converted into dwelling houses. The old Fourah Bay College building is now a dwelling place for refugees.

Maroon Church is a good example that should not die out. Its walls are cracking and even the building is cracking.

### **CONCLUSION**

There is so much to be done in our country concerning the documentation and inventory of our immovable cultural heritage. But unless the war ends such an achievement would never be met. However, we aim to succeed.

To update the existing list, collect more information, create awareness among the populace, set-up a team in the localities for participatory management create an inventory form and find a suitable storage system which can be easily used.

Sierra Leone is fortunate to have had her multi-party democracy restored and with the full implementation of the Lome Peace Accord, in view of the notable problems highlighted in this report, the writer strongly advocates for the implementation of the above recommendations as a means of making the monuments and relics commission more purposeful and relevant to the society it is supposed to serve.

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