

THE BEGINNING OF GHANA PRISONS SERVICE

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The actual history of the Ghana Prisons Service falls into four parts: the first part was 1876, the second part, 1876-1907, the third part, 1907-1920 and the fourth, 1920 to the present day.

Precisely, 1874 marked the development of the prisons from custodial institutions to the punitive institutions envisaged by the English prisons act, 1865.

The early Prisons before 1876

The prisons of the early period were mainly custodial institutions. In 1850, there were prisons cells in some four forts, holding a maximum of 129 prisoners. During this period, convict prisoners worked at repairing public roads and were permitted to earn a trifle by making straw hats for sale to the public.

Cladstone, a then colonial secretary, insisted that the prisoners should not be in chains, as was the practice of the early prisons in Ghana. A caretaker function of the early prisons was established in the prisons ordinance, 1860. It was a mere series of rules for the safe keeping of prisoners, embodying no comprehensive philosophy of punishment. The diet was generous enough. Prisoners were given 6lbs of kenkey daily with a pound of fish thrice weekly. Seeking to change the whole prison system in those days, the colonial office sent circulars addressed to all the colonial governors, asking them to place the total prison system on the same basis as that of England.

Therefore in 1869, the secretary of state wrote a letter to one Mr. Ussher the then administrator of the Gold Coast advising him on how to avoid overcrowding without the expense of building additional cells. The letter said: - "it may be done by resorting to shorter and sharper punishments, by whipping in addition to shorter terms of imprisonment or in total substitution for any imprisonment, by substituting in the early stages of imprisonment strictly penal labour and by lowering the diet to the minimum required for health. By these means the crowding of prisons becomes less not only by shortening the duration of each prisoner's term but also (as experience has shown) by lessening the number of offenders".

Prisons in 1876

1876 was the year that prison ordinance was introduced. This ordinance, whose dead hand still moulds the prison regulations of Ghana, was modelled carefully upon the prisons act, 1865. These regulations showed that prisoners were to be locked into separate cells at night, so far as accommodation will allow. Convict prisoners were not to speak or make any signs to any other prisoners, or to sing or whistle or even to make complaints to any but to senior prison officer or a visitor. Letters and visits were permitted only once in three months. Prisoners above the age of 16 years were to do short drills for three hour per day.

Early Prisons under Police

First police ordinance was passed in 1873 and the force re-name as the gold coast constabulary in 1876. It was originated on the lines of the royal Irish constabulary, by captain baker who was then the inspector general. In addition to the ordinary police duties, the officers of the constabulary were usually employed as district commissioners in charge of the various prisons.

The unsatisfactory state of the prisons had led to the commissioner of police being appointed to hold the office of superintendent of prisons in conjunction in 1902. All superior police officers supervised the local prisons, but the two departments were otherwise separated. European gaolers were employed in the larger prisons, and these had no control over the police.

As time went on, the prison department grew so large that it was no longer possible for the IGP (Police) to give it the attention it needed, with 21 prisons and several hundreds of staff. Therefore, in 1920, the two departments were separated and Captain Cookson became the first Inspector General of Prisons. The prisons at that time were at Accra, Sekondi, Cape Coast, Kumasi, Obuasi, and Tamale. There were also small prisons at Yeji, Salaga, Bole, Wa, Lawra, Tumu, Navrongo, Zuarungu, Gambaga and Bawku. A provincial medical officer was in-charge of the jail at Tamale.

Forts were the first prisons

James Fort was built in 1662 by the English at James Town, Accra while that of Winneba was built in 1694 by the English with Anomabu been built by the English in 1753 and Cape Coast Castle was built in 1664 by the English.

Prisons 1947-48

By 1948, there were 29 Penal Establishments maintained by the Prisons Department. Total lock up was **3,000** which was 400 less than that of 1947. Staff controlling prisons was increased by only three officers and eleven escort warders. In all, they were 15 officers and about 650 men. There were five central prisons, two prison camps and one industrial institution which were all managed by full time Superintendents.

The seventeen local prisons were managed by D.C.S. Native authorities' maintained 41 prisoners during the year of 1948. No more prisoners were sent to Salaga jail and that of Lawra was closed.

Between 1947 and 1948, a new prison was opened at Ankafu for criminals suffering from leprosy or tuberculosis.

Hangings of prisoners on death roll all took place at the Central prison at the James Fort, Accra. Tamale prisoners were sent to Accra, Kumasi, and Sekondi.

Industrial institutions which receive boys between the ages of 16 and 21 were established under the industrial school ordinance of 1945. There were improved fishing facilities in Keta, Accra and Cape Coast in 1948 than in 1947.

Prison Establishment by 1928

Gold Coast Colony- Axim, Cape Coast, Winneba, Akuse, Keta, Tarkwa, Elmina –Local Prisons (Gold Coast hand, 1928)

Ashanti- Kintampo, Sunyani, Obuasi –Local Prisons

Northern Territories- Navrongo, Zuarungu, Salaga, Gambaga, Wa, Bawku, Bole & Lawra- Local Prisons

Mandated Territories of Togoland -Ho, Kpando, Yendi and Krachi- Local Prison

By 1927, the total look up of prisoners was **1620**, made up **10 females, 1610 males**. In addition, **303 were first offenders 128 second offenders and 108 third offenders**.

Central prisons

In 1962, there were 6 central prisons in Ghana with a rated capacity of 1,955 persons. There were 17 local stations with a total rated capacity of 822 prisoners, one caretaker prison for elderly or invalid convicts, with a rated capacity of 3 persons. There were also two central female prisons, with a rated capacity of 29 prisoners. There were two camps, with a rated capacity of 1,111, one borstal institution with a rated capacity of 366 and one contagious disease prison, with a rated capacity of 91.

When the various Prisons were established and had First Inmates

Prison	Date	Prison	Date	Prison	Date	Prison	Date
Ussher Fort	15/2/1910	Akuse	17/9/1886	Cape coast	15/2/1910	Anomabu	1963
James Fort	15/2/1910	Keta	15/2/1910	Wa	25/7/1903	Nsawam	1960
Sekondi Central	15/2/1910	Koforidua	1945	Gambaga	25/7/1903	James Camp	7/2/1948
Sekondi Female	15/2/1910	Tarkwa	23/10/1889	Bawku	25/2/1914	Navrongo	23/2/1914
Kumasi Central	24/5/1902	Winneba	12/12/1881	SCC	19/5/1914	Ankaful CDP	20/12/1945
Tamale Central	23/2/1914	Obuasi	24/5/1910	Ho Female	1955		

Classification

According to the annual report of 1897, prisoners were never classified and separated. They used to work and sleep together in groups of 6-15.

Gold Coast Prison from 1907-1920

From 1907-1920, gold coast prison fell into the Gilbert and Sullivan terms. A full report on the Gold Coast Prisons concerning the need for reforms and modernisation was made in 1920. The report described the Gold Coast Prison thus:- a prison with its gates commonly opened by prisoners clerks; prison warders are often caught stealing cassava while working outside the walls of their own prisoners; a discharged prisoner asking “why? What for you go sack me” (legist council, 1919-20 admin/14/15).

In 1904, there were 34 escapes but more in the north-eastern district, because there was as restraint placed upon the prisoners there. In 1914, an acting superintendent reported that prisoners often supervise work while the warders became spectators. In 1917 that same acting superintendent wrote:- opportunities for escape are numerous and by a prisoner takes one. If the warder and the other prisoners cannot catch him as it is generally a case of hue and cry in nearly every report on an escapee, the warders “statement contains the phrase” me and the other prisoners gave chase. (dept. Report 1917). In 1918, the governor called attention to the fact that in many of the prisons, sentence of hard labour could not be enforced. (despatch no. 734 Oct, 9th 1918- from governor to secretary of state admin/558.) In 1920, the normally of punishment diet without

hard labour was stopped (sectional paper viii leg. Council, 1919-20 app. Adm 14/15). From this date onwards, prison penal labour was abolished.

Prison Labour and Trade

Prisons constituted a reserve pool of inexpensive labour for government, and in 1908 the annual report pointed out with pride to a growth in the return from prison industries, from £413, 19s-16d in 1904 to £2693, 11s-4d in 1908. However in 1910, the governor ordered that prison labour must be restricted to only government departments. In 1906, many people placed orders for work by prisoners. But in 1910, it was stopped because this system was displacing the local industries. In 1918, the public was again permitted to use prison labour. For this reason, larger sheds were built to accommodate the boot-making shops. (dept. Report 1918).

During this era, the major effort of the prison system, thus, turned away from harsh punishments to teaching prisoners a trade. In 1906, Major Kittson, who had visited the British prisons while on leave, wrote that the prisoners "took a delight" in learning a trade (despatch no.100, March 7th 1904). In 1927-28, there were two European technical instructors and sixteen trade instructors for a daily average of 1,706.25 prisoners. In 1962, there were 102 trade instructors, a senior instructor of industries and three instructors of industries. (Annual report 1962). By 1949, classes in the theory of the trade were developed. Trained ex-convicts often obtain employments in their crafts through the efforts of the department of social welfare. In 1937-38, all prisoners with a term of more than 6mths were given trade training.

By 1962, it was limited to prisoners serving more than 18 months or 2 years and above. However, today, only those sentenced to more than 3 years are admitted into the workshops. 1954-55 annual report stated that 70 percent of prisoners who received training were released before completion of training. This has in fact, made training really ineffective. Since prisoners go on discharge before they get to know what they should have learnt. It was therefore necessary to restrict training to only high sentence prisoners.

Prison rules and regulations which existed:-

Capt G.E. Cookson, the first Inspector General of Prisons (IGP) wrote the first prison regulations. One of his famous regulations is the prison regulation 173, now known as regulation 165. This regulation is most significant. The new regulations were enacted by the governor in council in 1922 and became effective on January 1st 1923-(reg. 29 of 1922, December, 9th 1922). These regulations helped in dragging the prison system, from a system of negative prevention to one of training and reformation.(gold coast report 1928-29). Regulation 165 is still in force. Certain rules also emerged in the 1960s. In 1960, it was a misdemeanour, with a maximum penalty of 33 years imprisonment for a prison officer to be an accessory to escape, smuggling illicit tobacco, spirits, or other matter into prison was a misdemeanour.

In 1965, the penalty was raised to 5 years imprisonment as minimum sentence. A new clause was added, making it a special crime for a prison officer directly or indirectly to aid, encourage or in any manner, facilitate the escape of a prisoner, with a minimum sentence of 10 years. In 1963, habitual criminal act, redivests on theft cases were to be sentenced to 'productive hard labour' in the discretion of court. The then deputy minister of education, Mrs Alhassan, speaking to the public (protection) bill, 1962, supported this idea. She said, such prisoners were not to serve in the prison but rather, a state factory or a co-operation

enterprise. The then leader of the house, Kofi Baako also supported and explained the idea that it would serve as a means for rehabilitation.

This Article is a Long Essay submitted to the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana in April 1980 by then Staff Sergeant Ambrose Imoru Salifu (rtd).