

The Journey of Quakers in Ghana

Prof Rose Emma Mamaa Entsua-Mensah

Introduction

Since 1925, there has been one unprogrammed Friends' meeting, Hill House Meeting, in the tradition of London Yearly Meeting, attached to Achimota School and college.

The main difference between programmed and unprogrammed meetings is in the worship service structure: unprogrammed meetings are based on extended periods of silence, where anyone can share a message if "moved by the Spirit," while programmed meetings follow a set order of service with a pastor, hymns, songs, readings, and a prepared message, though they often still incorporate some silent meditation.

But we both hold on to the tenets of George Fox and the essential doctrine of Quakerism is the inner light, or the belief that all people are able to directly encounter God or Truth inwardly and so have direct access to revelation.

Achimota College was founded in 1924 by Sir Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, Dr. James Emman Kwegyir Aggrey, and Rev. Alexander Garden Fraser. Construction began that year, and the college was formally opened in 1927.

The Hill House Meeting originates from a group of British Quakers (who came as engineers to build the school and as staff for Achimota school (primary, secondary and teacher training then later became University of Gold Coast now Ghana) from 1925 and established a meeting for themselves and for other members of staff. In 1934, they built the Hill House Meeting Garden shelter on the school property.

Rev. Alec Garden Fraser was a prominent founder and the first principal of Achimota College, and his ideals deeply influenced the school's approach to education. He was

a Quaker who believed in combining academic excellence with the preservation of African culture, influencing his staff and the school's curriculum.

Rev. Alec Garden Fraser: As the first Principal and a co-founder, Fraser was instrumental in establishing Achimota and shaping its founding ideals. He brought a strong belief in the value of African culture and education for societal upliftment.

The Impact of Fraser's Quaker Beliefs on Achimota

- **Cultural Preservation:**

Fraser's Quaker-influenced ideals promoted the integration of traditional African culture into the curriculum, moving away from a purely Eurocentric education.

- **Ephraim Amu:**

Fraser appointed Ephraim Amu, a musician and scholar who was dismissed from a Presbyterian college for promoting tribal music and dance, to teach at Achimota. This decision highlights Fraser's commitment to innovative teaching methods and cultural inclusion.

- **Community and Service:**

The school's ethos, embodying Fraser's vision, encouraged mutual understanding, service, and cooperation among students and staff of diverse backgrounds.

Also at Achimota College at that time was Frank Irvine who wrote the famous book “The Fish and Fishes of the Gold Coast” in 1947.

Due to career changes and postings, the Meeting remained small between 1925 and the early 1940's, with a predominantly expatriate membership and a few Ghanaians. Meetings lapsed in the mid-40's before a flurry of activity from 1947 – 1948, led by Mrs. Ione Acquah.

In 1947 David and Ione Acquah were married at the Sekondi Methodist Church. Ione was a quaker and David a Methodist. This is an excerpt from Ione Acquaah's diary kindly provided by her daughter Catherine

“The Warden of the College (Achimota) at that time was a Friend (Charles Deakin). Once a fortnight, we had a Quaker Meeting in our home, and once a fortnight at the College. The attendance was usually two Quakers and between four to six attenders.”

Sunday, 9 November: 1947 *“Rose at 6 a.m., and at 7:15 Charles Deakin, Warden of the University Side of Achimota called for David and I in his car to take us to Hill House for a Quaker Meeting. Just the three of us. Was very nice to attend a meeting again. It seems that he and I are the only Friends in the country at present. He took us back to his house for breakfast....”*

19 January 1948: *“Yesterday, the first Quaker Meeting was held in our home. Charles Deakin, Mr. Coleman, Mr. Obuobi and David and I were present, and it was a nice meeting. I am happy that we are able to meet here for it is what I have missed since my arrival in the Gold Coast. They will be held fortnightly*

26 January 1948: *“The Prison Authorities allow me access into James Fort at any time and I am going to help to teach the female prisoners knitting, sewing and embroidery. The men have lectures organized by Yaw Boateng and I am to help with those. Went to one last week by a prisoner on “How to Build a Farm”. Interested and animated audience. Like the atmosphere of this prison which I attribute chiefly to the Superintendent in charge. He is very nice and there is order without rigid discipline. Men seem cheerful but I shall come to know them more as time goes on.”*

1953-1960

In early 1953, Ioné and David Acquah were reposted to Accra. There was a sizeable number of expatriate friends and their families at the new University of the Gold Coast, which occupied the same grounds as Achimota school and college. Another reason for the upsurge in Quaker activities in the country was the search among Ghanaians for a new religious experience; they sought and found an attraction to the Quaker way of worshiping and praying in silence.

In 1954, Gordon Green, an English Quaker organized the first workcamp to give students the opportunity to experience first-hand conditions in the rural areas and to combat underdevelopment in Ghana (then Gold Coast). A year later, the Department of Extra-Mural Studies of the then Cape Coast College recognized the work of Gordon Green and his small army of volunteers and invited them to participate in the construction of the present day Tsito Adult Residential College at Tsito Awudome in the Volta Region. On September 1, 1956, the Voluntary Workcamps Association of Ghana (VWAG) was formally inaugurated. The Voluntary Workcamps Association of Ghana is better known in Ghana and elsewhere as "VOLU". The vision of Gordon Green and his associates was to channel the leisure time and the energy of the Ghanaian youth into a productive service in the rural areas to facilitate rural development through self-reliance and community work. VWAG adopted "Service to Mankind" as its motto and committed to its members and resources:

By 1954, Friends had identified their need for a gathering of all Friends resident in Ghana, as well as any who are working in neighboring countries and might wish to share a fellowship with their Ghanaian counterparts. The first Easter Gathering of Friends came off that year and has become an annual event.

1961-1980

Friends in the Gold Coast, now Ghana, initiated annual Easter Gatherings where all members from the then four meeting centers—Cape Coast, Kumasi, Tema, and Accra—would come together for fellowship over the Easter weekend. This grew bigger and bigger, with participants from neighboring countries in West Africa, and with West Indian, American, and European Friends also joining in. At that point, Friends in Ghana came under the umbrella of Friends World Committee for Consultation.

In the mid-1960s, Friends in Ghana became anxious to relate even more closely to the Christian Community in Ghana. Accordingly, it sought and was admitted into the Membership of the Christian Council of Ghana as a constituent members. Quakers in Ghana are members of the Christian Council of Ghana. There was a time when the Chairman, David Acquaah, was a Quaker. They began interfaith activities that enriched the Christian fraternity in a positive way.

There were Quaker teachers at Achimota College (later known as University of Ghana) Mfantsipim School, Wesley Girls High School, Mfantsiman Girls Secondary School, Aburi Girls Secondary School and the University of Cape Coast.

Some notable quakers at that time were Clarice Garnett who was the Headmistress of Wesley Girls High School, Barbara Bowman her Assistant, Jean Malholland and Daphne Paintin who had taught at Aburi Girls and Ackworth School in Pontefract in the UK and in Mfantsiman Miss Doris Scotton the headmistress, Miss Lois Brown, and Miss Jeanne Harrison a staff. Also in Cape Coast were the Dankwa family, Prof Kwesi Haizel, Alice and Kofi Mensah, Quansah, Paitoo, Mark, Essau, Helena Bradford, Hetty Budgen, me and Isaac Bankah. They held stimulating discussions in their houses on Wednesdays and meetings on Sundays. It is no wonder that Edwina a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dankwa and their Grandson Nicholas are very involved in organizing this Centenary Celebration. At the University were the

Pearsons, who gave their 4 boys Ghanian names, Ofori, Senanu, Talima and Amartey. I recently looked them up in Google and they are all successful academics. The University of Cape Coast was also privileged to have Walter Birmingham, a renowned Economist, and his wife Maisie.

At the University of Ghana was John Hall also a renowned Biologist, Sidney and Nabilla Williams (who are both deceased) and Prof George Ofosu-Armah of the Law School.

Some notable attenders were Efua Sutherland, Kofi Annan the former UN Secretary General, and Komla Agbeli Gbedemah a political activist and a colleague of Kwame Nkrumah our first President. There were times when the Cape Coast Meeting was stronger and had more members than Hill House in Accra, Despite that there was always a small band of quakers in Ghana keeping the fires burning.

Following the coup in Ghana in 1979, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council gained power in Ghana with the battle cry “Let the Blood Flow.” Quakers, led by the Clerk at that time, David Aquaah influenced by their peace testimony, joined hands with other advocacy groups and individuals who were opposed to executions, and they successfully compelled the authorities to stop the atrocities and the excesses of the revolution.

1980-2000

A lot of Expatriate Quakers left Ghana during this period and most members at this time were Ghanian. The Meeting in Cape Coast grew stronger and even though the members were not many they involved themselves in a lot of projects and activities.

Prof Haizel, Dora and Joyce Dankwa, Isaac Bankah and I were staunch members and held the meeting together, Occasionally Ivy and Edwina joined us. In Accra David and Leonie Acquah, Nora Courts, Edwina, Rita and Ivy Dankwa, Kumah

Drah, Aaron Dodoo, Oswald Dodoo and Frank Addo as well Alice Appiah and her group from Tema who held the fort. Forgive me if I may have left a few people out

2000-2025

The number of Quakers in Ghana constitute a very minute percentage of Christians in the country compared to other countries in Africa but have contributed in many ways to peace and development. Hill House Meeting is now the only active meeting in the country. Members hope to revive discontinued meetings in the near future by reactivating some of the previous activities that attracted membership.

Having done some introspection, Hill House Friends have found out that the Quaker way of worship and the freedom to search is too simple or too difficult for the average Ghanaian, who would like to worship in an imposing church building with charismatic clergy, pray for miracles and prosperity amidst loud music, and “make a joyful noise to the Lord.” But we continue to believe that more people will see Quakerism as a way of life and join us. God writes straight on crooked lines.

Recently Hill House was visited by a group of African American Quakers who thoroughly enjoyed their visit. Hillhouse continues to have links with Stanstead Meeting and Lynne the Clerk who wanted to be here with us unfortunately had a sprained ankle and could not make it

In 2009 we had to rebuild Hill House and members met at the weekends to do this. Hill House Meeting is kept alive now by a dedicated selfless band of people: Leslie, Kuma, Edwina, Johnson. Mawuli. Aaron, Kwame, Ato Sekyi, Janice Acquah daughter of David Acquah, Kukuwa Manful, who helped to redesign the pavillion, Moses, Rosemary Andoh, Frank Andoh, Fulera, Agyeiwa, Elizabeth, Kobby Graham,, John, myself, Nabilla Williams (now deceased) and Kujoe,

Some notable activities undertaken by Hill House:

Social Work

In line with the tradition of Friends, Quakers in Ghana, right from their very early beginnings, have sought to render social service as a testimony of their concept of work and worship being inseparable.

The Red Cross

Frank Jocelyn rendered pioneering services in the creation of Junior Red Cross Links in Educational Institutions in the early 1930s from his base at Achimota School and College.

Liberal Studies

With the support of the Prisons Authority in the Gold Coast, Ione Acquah promoted liberal studies, lectures and Library services in Accra and later in Sekondi.

Voluntary Work Camp Association (VOLU)

Supported by Friends in Accra, Cape Coast etc and with the considerable patronage of Francis L. Bartels (then Headmaster of the Mfantsipim School), Gordon Greene. and John Hall started the Voluntary Work Camp Association of Ghana (VOLU) which was formally inaugurated in 1956.

Funding for Community Development

- Corn mill Project at Putubiw, near Cape Coast.
- Funds for Lume Community travel to Kenya in brick and tile making project (Lume is 10 miles from Ho in the Volta Region).
- A social survey to establish some community needs in Nima was undertaken by a South African Sociologist – Ngysani under the supervision of Professor St Claire Drake, an American Visiting professor then in the Gold Coast.

Nutritional and Health Project

- The Accra schools nutritional and health project under the supervision of Adam Curle, Professor of Education at the University of Ghana and the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development and the Ministries of Health and Education. Covered selected schools in Jamestown.
- Hill House, London Yearly Meeting, Wesley Girls' High School, Ministry of Health were involved in the Nkanful Mental Hospital Project to support the occupational therapy unit in Cape Coast.

Educational Support

- Posting of Quaker volunteers to various teaching posts in Ghana – Wesley Girls' High School (Cape Coast), Aburi Girls' Secondary School (Aburi), Mfantsiman Girls Secondary School, Navrongo Secondary School (Navrongo) and Ghana International School (Accra).
- Aburi Girls' School Domestic Science project at Gyankama directed by Sarah Hall(nee Ainsworth) and financed by Hill House.

In all this Hill House meeting tries to adhere to the Quaker testimonies of : Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship or Sustainability. These are not rigid beliefs but commitments to a way of living that expresses spiritual insights in daily life, reflecting the belief in "that of God in everyone". We in Hill house strive to live out these values as a "witness to the living from programmed and unprogrammed meetings we all listen to the still small voice within us. Let us go back having learnt from each other and with a renewed commitment to our Quaker faith.

I would like to thank the organizers of this workshop for the yeoman's job done, especially Edwina and to welcome you once again to Ghana

Thank you very much for listening to me. *Asante Sanaa*