

George Pepple - Black and Asian People in Victorian Bexley

Born in Africa, George Pepple attended the school at Hall Place, Bexley.

Ubani Nigeria

Ubani is a port by the Bonny River between Port Harcourt and Calabar in Southeast Nigeria and the Bonny River itself - one of the mouths of the River Niger. This densely populated area is home to the Ibibio people. Shortly before 1600 a city- state called Ubani was formed with a hereditary king of the Pepple Dynasty under the title of "Amanyabo". The Ibibio first came into contact with Europeans in the mid-fifteenth century when Portuguese traders arrived and the coast soon earned the name of "Slave Coast". Slaves were taken from the Igbo (ibo) people inland to the north. The Portuguese traders were later followed by the Dutch and then by the British in the eighteenth century. It was the British who renamed the state Bonny. At the port of Bonny alone up to 16,000 Igbo were sold each year during the 1700s. With the British Act of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807 a new era of trade developed in West Africa. This was marked by the exploitation of Palm products, Ivory and Guinea Pepper (Melegueta) by private companies.

King William Dappa

King William Dappa became increasingly incompetent especially after his stroke in 1852 and serious opposition to his rule led to his deportation to Britain in 1854 by the British Consul. At Bonny attempts to appoint a puppet-ruler failed and the state slid into chaos, forcing the British to restore William Dappa Pepple in August 1861. During the next five years prior to his death William Dappa Pepple was unable to restore peace and stability in the Bonny area.

Prince George Pepple at Hall Place School

William Dappa Pepple's son George Oruigbiji Pepple (born 1849) accompanied his father to England and was educated at the boys' school at Hall Place, Bexley. George Pepple appears in the 1861

census as a boy born at Bonny, Africa. At that time Hall Place was a school run by a Mr. Armstrong.

Like other boys from wealthy families who attended the school at Hall Place, George would have been taught a variety of subjects including: English, Greek, Mathematics, scripture and history. An 1843 prospectus promoted Hall Place as being "situated in a beautiful and healthy part of Kent, between the villages of Bexley and Crayford, about 12 miles from London and a half a mile to the south of the high road to Dover. The spacious and airy dormitories and class room of this ancient edifice and the extensive pleasure grounds by which it is surrounded present no ordinary attractions to those parents who feel how essentially pure air and regular exercise contribute to the health and happiness of their Children."

The prospectus continued to tell prospective parents that the "whole system of Instruction in this school has for its object the cultivation of the moral, physical and intellectual faculties and the formation of habits of industry and self-government."

King George Pepple

So after leaving Hall Place the British educated George Oruigbiji Pepple assumed the throne of Bonny in September 1866. In December 1872 HMS Torch under Captain Hugh McNeil[e] Dyer was sent on an Anti-slavery mission to the Slave Coast. The British Consul at this time was Mr. Charles Livingstone, a brother of the famous explorer David Livingstone. George Pepple was rather unpopular with his subjects leading to internal unrest and the throne being vacant between 1883 and 1887, after which George was returned as ruler for just under a year. In 1885 The British Oil Rivers Protectorate was extended over Bonny and this was renamed as the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893.

Research by Cliff Pereira & Simon McKeon

References and further reading

Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

- Census for Bexley, 1861
- Hall Place School Print, 1809
- Celebrating Black and Asian History in Bexley Teacher's Pack

- Hall Place by P E Morris
- The Great Estates: Six Country Houses in the London Borough of Bexley by Oliver Wooller
- Records of Hall Place School