



70 years

OF EXCELLENT SECONDARY EDUCATION



THE SUCCESS STORY OF PRESBYTERIAN BOYS' SECONDARY SCHOOL

BY PROFESSOR J.S. DJANGMAH
(OLD BOY 1953 - 1955)

Foreword

This article is the keynote address at the PRESEC 70th anniversary celebrations which appeared in a June 2008 edition of the Daily Graphic.

It was adapted for download and print by the Odadee Class of 1975 on the advice of Mr Fred Quaye.

Odadee 1975

The success story of the Presbyterian Boys Secondary

By Professor J. S. Djangmah (Old Boy 1953 – 1955)

The Presbyterian Boys' Secondary School (PRESEC), Legon, is 70 years old this year, having spent 30 years (1938 to 1968) at its original site, Odumase-Krobo, and 40 years (1968 to 2008) at its present location, Legon, near the University of Ghana.

At the launch of the 70th anniversary on February 15 2008, the old boys, the ODADEE (including, I believe, the privileged girls who attended the PRESEC Sixth Form Science College), did me the honour of delivering the keynote address.

This article is based on that address, which some of my mates asked me to publish to reach more old boys and others including members of the Presbyterian Church.

Many of the historical details mentioned in this paper were lifted from the 50th Anniversary Brochure compiled by two old boys – Mr Dabi-Dankwa, a former senior director of education of the Ghana Education Service, and Reverend Dr Nicholas Timothy Clerk, former Rector of Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration and 1949 Senior Prefect.

The paper is written from my perspective as a student in the 1952-1955 group. The school board and the old boys chose the theme for the anniversary, "70 years of Excellent Secondary Education".

The founding fathers of PRESEC

Every anniversary of an institution is an occasion to recognise and appreciate once more the toils and tribulations of gallant men and women whose vision and zeal laid the foundations of the institution. In the case of the Presbyterian Boys Secondary, the gallant men were first and foremost the Gold Coast Church leaders, led by Reverend Nicholas Timothy Clerk (First Synod Clerk of the Presbyterian Church, 1918 to 1932), who pursued the vision of a Presbyterian Secondary School against strong opposition from the Basel and Scottish Missionaries, who did not believe that it was their responsibility to provide higher education beyond their mission of training teachers and catechists.

The founding fathers of course include the succession of dedicated headmasters and teachers whose toils and dedication at Odumase-Krobo built the foundations on which PRESEC was built. In a larger sense, the founding fathers of PRESEC include the Basel Missionaries (and later the Scottish Missionaries) who established the Akropong Presbyterian Training College as far back as 1848, to produce a steady stream of trained teachers and church leaders, who staffed the Presbyterian Middle Schools, and eventually PRESEC.

Without the support of the colonial government and also the supervising Scottish Mission, PRESEC began in 1938 at Odumase-Krobo under difficult circumstances. According to the late Professor E. A. Boateng, "the price for this courageous action by the church was that the new school, was severely handicapped in its critical initial stages by the lack of funding or even visible moral support from the Scottish Mission, quite unlike the situation in other secondary schools in the country founded by or associated with the various religious bodies". The late Mr Moses Dovlo who entered the school in 1948, writing in the 60th Anniversary Brochure, painted quite well the difficulties his generation and the earlier generations endured.

He said: "In our days at Odumase-Krobo, we had no pipe-borne water, then I remember, with nostalgia, our treks of about 10 miles from Odumase to Kpong and back every Saturday to wash our school and church uniforms and fetch water back to school to last a whole week. The school had no science laboratories but was able to produce distinguished scientists! We should all be proud that today PRESEC is the leading science college in Ghana".

The Basel Mission attempted rather unsuccessfully to start a secondary school at Akropong and also at Christiansborg as far back as 1863. The African church leaders who pushed the founding of PRESEC in 1938 wanted the products of church schools to become not only teachers and catechists but trained professionals in all disciplines. The words of Reverend D. E. Akwa, the Synod Clerk in 1936, captured well this vision. He said to the Synod:

"I wish to inform all interested (and disinterested) that the benefits which will accrue from secondary education are like hidden treasure today. But there are indications that if the school is well established and properly managed the next 20 years will show development of church and state."

The church leaders must have been motivated by the example of Mfantsipim established by the Gold Coast Methodist Church. Like the Anglicans who did not wish that their children became Methodists after attending Mfantsipim, and so established Adisadel College in 1910, the Presbyterian Church leaders were also disturbed that they were losing their sons to the Methodists after attending Mfantsipim.

The PRESEC school anthem (written and composed by J. L. Anang) captured fully the vision and mission of the founding fathers as follows:

Happy are we! Studios are we! Students of Presbyterian Secondary School, Onward we march, we trudge along to Happy Victory, to victory, to victory. Our motto is a solid bulwark propping us along.
IN LUMINE TUO LUMINE, TUO VEDEBIMUS LUMEN, In thy light, they light, we shall see light, In Lumine tuo Videbimus Lumen For Christian training we get a sure solid foundation to take our places in the future of our country and church. O come along and join us. O Come along and join us. Happy, studios are we!

No words inspire past and present generation as much as the words of the PRESEC anthem. Its selection as an all schools' anthem for national sporting events in the 1960s showed the extent to which the late Ohene-Djan sought permission from the school authorities to adopt the PRESEC anthem for that purpose.

In his book, the *Presbyterian Church of Ghana (1957-1960)*, Noel Smith, former principal (1957-1962) of Akropong Training College wrote:

"The record of the boys' school at Odumase-Krobo has been an enviable one. With an all-African staff from the outset its academic achievements have been good; the Christian tone of the school has been well maintained and the school has played an important part in training boys for responsible posts in public life and in the church."

My Generation at PRESEC (1952 to 1955)

I was a 14-year-old boy at a small private secondary school, St Andrews College, at Korle Gonno, Accra when a Krobo friend, Azu, informed me that PRESEC conducted a special entrance examination to admit students into Form 3, rather than Form 2, where admissions were based on the Common Entrance. I immediately wrote to the Principal, Mr E. J. Klufio, who very kindly invited me to take the examination. January 1953 found me a very happy little boy, among very bright pupils of my age and being taught by dedicated teachers.

Naturally, ODADEE'S who are closest to me belong to my generation. A few of them have become my regular pals, they include Professor Lade Wosornu, a surgeon and a Bronsted Gold Medallist of Glasgow University and the 1955 Senior Prefect; Mr Sam Kofi Odotei, a retired Chief Librarian at the United Nations Centre in Dakar, Senegal; Mr Joseph Ahwa Laryea, former Chief Director, also a Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a former Ghana's Ambassador to the European Union; Justice F. T. Faakye, recently retired Appeal Court Judge; Dr Alex Yeboa Duodu, formerly of the Crops Research Institute of the CSIR in retirement at Nsaba; Dr S. T. Quarcoo and Dr Samuel Ntiamoah Darfoor, both retired gynaecologists who live in the UK; Mr Sam Anum, a retired accountant; Wing Commander Sam Boadu, a retired Officer of the Ghana Air Force; the late General F. W. K. Akuffo, former Head of State of Ghana; the late Colonel E. T. Oklah of the Ghana Army; and the late Dr Osafo Mintah, formerly of UTC.

The Success Presec chalked up quite early since its foundation in 1938 was evident to me soon after I got to the school. We heard the names of past students whose huge and bold footprints we were not about to equal. Some of the great names include, Emmanuel Bamfo Kwakye, who left PRESEC in 1950 and excelled at the Achimota Sixth Form, later distinguished himself in engineering in Germany and became a Vice-Chancellor of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology; the late George Tawiah, an accountant, the late Jonathan Herbert Frimpong-Ansah (later Governor of the Bank of Ghana); the Clerk brothers, Nicholas Timothy Clerk later of GIMPA and the Public Services Commission and George Carver Clerk (later Professor of Botany, Legon); Martin Agyemang Odei (later Deputy Director-General of CSIR).

I did not notice the rather modest premises of the school. I only noticed the deprivation that we endured at Odumase-Krobo, only when I entered the sixth form of St. Augustine's College in Cape Coast, together with Lade Wosornu, Yeboa Doudu, and Zabdiel Osei in 1956. Some of the good students we met at St. Augustine's College included the late P. A. V. Ansah, Norbert Kofinti of Legon Mathematics, Kaku Kyamah, electrical engineer, and many others. From Odumase, our performance was way above what would be expected of students from a school with one laboratory for Physics, Chemistry and Biology, and one old microscope rumoured to have been donated by Achimota School. This was also the experience of our other colleagues, Joseph Ahwa Laryea, Martin Alabi Minsah and Arnold Washington Clerk who went to Prempeh College Sixth Form.

PRESEC: The School that Messrs E. A. W. Engmann and E. J. Klufio Built

The founding headmaster was Mr E. A. W. Engmann (later Reverend Engmann) who was assisted by three teachers (Messrs Agyei Tetebo, Ebenezer Ako, and E. J. Djoletto) to establish the school at Odumase-Krobo in old buildings vacated by the Basel Mission. The foundation teachers, as well as the headmaster, were not university graduates, they were largely trained teachers many of them through self-tuition had passed the London Matriculation Examination, and Intermediate BA or BSc, the equivalent of the "A" level. By

1953 when I entered PRESEC, a sizeable number of university graduates were on the staff, many former teachers had earned degrees from universities abroad or at the University College of the Gold Coast.

The key to PRESEC's success has been the dedication of the succession of able headmasters, starting from Rev. E. A. W. Engmann to Rev. E. K. Klufio, Mr. E. K. Datsa, Mr. Atuah-Afari, Rev. E. S. Mate-Kodjo, Mr. Apeadu, Mr. Akuoko, Mr. J. J. Asare and currently Mr. Africanus Kwame Anane.

Prempeh College, a close relation of Presec, belonging jointly to the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, was established in 1949. Before then, there was no secondary school in the whole of Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, and Northern Ghana, which is now the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions. Writing in a history of Prempeh College, a former headmaster of Prempeh College, Dr T. A. Osai, said that the tradition of sixth-form schools receiving students from other schools without sixth-forms was good for his school. He said that some of these students had difficulty settling down to the tradition at Prempeh but it should be "publicly stated that some of the best Sixth Formers Prempeh ever had had, came from other schools. In this regard special mention should be made of the Presbyterian Secondary School, Odumase-Krobo who made great waves at Prempeh College. They were the late Aaron Ashitey Ollenu and F. W. K. Akuffo (later an electrical engineer). A former mathematics teacher of Prempeh College, the Mr V. C. Dadson, told me how when marking terminal examinations, Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics teachers, all wanted to know who that Ashitey Ollenu was! He had eight ones at the Ordinary Level. Ollenu had an unhappy postgraduate career. When I re-discovered him teaching at an Accra school, in the 1980s, I rehabilitated him to the University of Cape Coast, where I was a pro-vice chancellor. Unfortunately he had already been so battered by life; he could not live long after that. The Ollenu family of La must have replaced that genius in the person of one Dr Trebi-Ollenu, currently a scientist and an engineer at NASA, and a director in the space exploration programme to the planet Mars. He went to GSTS, Takoradi.

PRESEC has not been all about academic excellence. In the late 1950s and early 1960s Presec excelled fantastically in Sports and Athletics. PRESEC won the coveted Aggrey Shield, the medal for annual inter-school athletics and sports competition, in both 1958 and 1959, coached by the famous sports master, Mr W. E. Amoah. Many great athletes showcased PRESEC in the 1960s. Two great sportsmen from PRESEC, J. C. Amui and J. K. Tengey, became national sports heroes.

The PRESEC Science and Sixth-Form College

Presec reached a new height of academic excellence at Legon when the school became Ghana's only science sixth-form college in the late 1970s and early 1990s. Taught by some of the best science teachers in Ghana, a cream of very bright young men and women trooped to PRESEC to produce some of the best 'A' level results Ghana had seen. A record of their achievements is documented in the 60th Anniversary Brochure. To these bright people three or four As at the 'A' Levels was like child's play. In 1983 four boys, Kwabena Adu Boahen, Victor Ayitey Bruce, Mama Markwei Sawyerr, and John Kweku Miah, filled an entire page with what the American call straight A's.

The world's leading popular science magazine, the *Scientific American*, of May 2005 featured an article, which read; Mimic the Nervous System with Neuromorphic Microchips. The author was Kwabena Adu Boahen, a professor of bioengineering at the University of Pennsylvania at the time, currently his at Stanford University. I was so thrilled I wrote to the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences to make him a fellow! Kwabena's area of specialisation is the artificial retina. Kwabena's generation at the PRESEC Science Sixth Form represent the future and the success of that experiment.

In Science, Medicine, Economics, the Arts, Athletics, PRESEC had achieved great laurels. In music, I read about one Professor Victor Kofi Agawu, a professor of Music in Princeton University. In 2005 a Harvard University News Bulletin said the following about Agawu:

“Musical theorist V. Kofi Agawu, a scholar whose research and writing span musical traditions from Gustav Mahler to the Ewe people of Ghana, has been appointed professor of music and African and African-American studies in Harvard University’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, effective July 1. Agawu, 49, is currently professor of music at Princeton University and a visiting scholar at the University of Ghana. Professor Agawu is a rare scholar whose professional interests cross traditional boundaries within musical scholarship, encompassing music theory, ethnomusicology, and historical musicology, says William C. Kirby, Edith and Benjamin Geisinger Professor of History and dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. He demonstrates deep commitment to two very different musical traditions, in 18th and 19th century Europe and in West Africa, linking the two through his attention to music’s structure and significance within specific historical and social settings. He is widely regarded as a thoughtful and considerate colleague and a wonderful influence on his students.”

The 60th Anniversary Brochure recorded the names of two other Music professors. They are the late Professor Robert Kwami and Professor Christian Tagoe.

Reflections on 70 years of PRESEC: The way forward

PRESEC began in 1938 totally dependent on the meagre resources of the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast without assistance from the colonial government. In spite of the minimal facilities available, the dedication that the first and second headmasters of the school, followed by a succession of equally able headmasters and teachers, brought to the task of teaching and the high quality of students that came from the Presbyterian Middle (and Boarding) Schools soon placed the Presbyterian Secondary School at par with the elite secondary school at par with the elite secondary schools in the Gold Coast and Ghana.

The success that PRESEC chalked up very early has ingredients that must not be forgotten. For a long time, the teachers were Presbyterian-trained Gold Coast teachers, initially without graduate qualifications. A high level of discipline based on the Presbyterian training was enforced. It was not a problem for the students who were largely products of Presbyterian senior schools. In 1953 when many students failed the School Certificate because they failed in English language, Klufio imposed a regime of one-hour (3-4pm) compulsory reading of English classics each school day. The results were dramatic especially in 1955 and subsequently.

PRESEC moved from Odumase-Krobo to Legon in 1968. The controversy that marked the re-housing is behind us now but the lessons must be learnt. By 1948, the colonial Government had allocated 230,000 pounds to re-house the school. Short-sightedness and internal politics of the church delayed this move. The words of a non-Gold Coaster on this issue, the Reverend Noel Smith, in his book on the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, are worthy of note. He said:

“The discussion regarding the site of the new school aroused intense controversy within the Church and set back indefinitely the erection of new buildings. It was a sign that tribal feelings were still strong. Claims were vehemently put forward that the school be located in Christiansborg; others advanced Akwapim and others the Krobo Area. The Government, which was providing the money, would have preferred the school to be re-housed in its present location, but it finally acceded to Synod’s ‘irrevocable’ decision to a site near Christiansborg”

That was a era gone. One school amongst 10 or less in 1948 was a novelty whose new location would lend itself to lobbying of all kinds. We now have 33 Presbyterian secondary schools throughout the country. Many congregations singly or jointly are rich enough to sponsor secondary schools. Trained, as well as graduate teachers are no longer scarce. The government and the churches can only be limited by foresight to ask the right questions so as to transform these schools to the level of great schools. Secondary education now is the logical follow-up to primary education.

Form many Ghanaians who really demand education for their wards it is unthinkable that a secondary school will not be found. The secondary school is also no longer the school for only the budding academic or professional. The curriculum is no longer as limited as it was at PRESEC Odumase-Krobo. Technical, vocational, business, visual arts and agriculture, have all entered the regular curriculum. It is no longer necessary to travel long distances to avail a child of the opportunity to attend secondary school.

The Presbyterian Middle Boarding Schools whose products filled PRESEC of old no longer offer the quality education associated with them in the past. The private primary and junior secondary schools have taken over as the schools of choice.

Quality outside these schools is limited. That is the problem for the churches, which pioneered formal education in Ghana to consider jointly without the Government. It is a far more complicated issue than churches simply asking the Government to hand over the schools that they took over from them. We no longer need missionaries from Basel, Switzerland, to show us the way forward.

Recently in a interview Reverend Dr Nicholas Timothy Clerk, the grandson of the missionary and first Synod Clerk of the Presbyterian Church, Reverend Nicholas Timothy Clerk, said in an interview on CITY FM that the sky was the limit for PRESEC.

I agree with him. He said that the motto of PRESEC, that is, IN THY LIGHT WE SHALL SEE LIGHT, which connotes the concept that in the light that God shines on our path, we shall see all other forms of light, that is knowledge of different forms. He said it was a beautiful idea. I agree with him. I am sure all old boys and others would agree with Reverend Clerk.

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