

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10670-2 - They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College 1922-1962

Margaret Macpherson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CHAPTER I

## THE SITE, 1921-25

'At present there is a grave danger of the country being flooded with half-educated men, whose education does not fit them to fill any place in the life of the community which satisfies the ambitions created by their education.'

H. O. SAVILLE: *First Annual Report, Makerere College, 1922*

Education in Uganda in the early days was entirely in the hands of the missions who had begun schools as soon as they arrived, and had, long before Makerere was thought of, established a network of schools over the country, the largest concentration being in Buganda. There were day schools which provided a minimum of education, and a few boarding schools which provided a Junior Secondary course, mostly for boys although Gayaza High School for girls was already in existence and there was some provision for the education of girls in the other missions. Government made grants to the various missions, but took no further active part until 1912, when a form of technical instruction for artisans was resolved upon and there was some discussion of a possible course for clerks. This, however, was shelved because the problems of terms of service when there was no African Civil Service appeared insoluble without a considerable amount of discussion. Mr Tomblings, Principal of Makerere College from 1925-39, recalls, in a Speech Day address, the leisureliness of life that made this procrastination understandable.

'The more prominent citizens rode or drove mules while the less fortunate . . . achieved the journey to and from the Administrative Headquarters by ricksha. . . The Chief Justice owned a steam motor car and it was one of the sights of Entebbe, watching it being heated up with a spirit lamp preparatory to making a safari to the "hub of the universe".'

Be that as it may, nothing further was achieved before the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10670-2 - They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College  
1922-1962

Margaret Macpherson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

### *They Built for the Future*

1914–18 war. But at the end of the war there was a considerable demand for artisans of all kinds from the neighbouring territories; wages went up and it was forcibly brought home to the Government that there was a real necessity for training local artisans. At the same time the demand from the people themselves for a more highly organized system of education was growing. War conditions were giving way to peace and the desire for advance in education and in agriculture, the need for better communications and a better opportunity for careers for educated men was answered, in the first place, by a development loan.

In September 1919, the Governor, Sir Robert Coryndon, formed a committee to discuss ‘without delay’ the part Government should play in education, and by August the following year deliberations were far enough on for him to telegraph to the Secretary of State for authority to begin at once a training institution.

Where to build it was the next question, and a board was appointed to examine possible sites. There were five men on the board: the Provincial Commissioner, the Land Officer, the Director of Transport, the Commissioner and the Provincial Medical Officer. They were to find a site within 50 miles of Kampala, and preferably within twenty. The Rev. Dr C. A. Wiggins, the Provincial Medical Officer, recalls, ‘I asked the Governor if we were to look five, ten or fifty years ahead. He replied, “Fifty”.’<sup>1</sup>

Sir Robert Coryndon was to a very large extent responsible for the beginning of Makerere, and he always maintained a great interest in its progress. His name figures first on the list of founders and it is to be regretted that it is not commemorated in any College building. His reply to Dr Wiggins is typical of his far-sightedness. The board considered some ten or twelve sites suggested by the Provincial Commissioner and the Saza (County) Chiefs, and four of them selected a site near Bombo. The Provincial Medical Officer, however, sent in a minority report recommending Makerere. The Governor inspected both sites and agreed with Dr Wiggins. There are

### *The Site, 1921–25*

many advantages in the Makerere site, not least that it is obviously advisable for a college to be close to a centre of culture, particularly in an emergent country such as Uganda; although, had the board realized the difficulty there would be later in acquiring more land for expansion, they might have found cause to regret that they did not negotiate for land even further ahead.

The site was approved on 4 November 1920, and by February, Sir Robert was urging the immediate opening of a Central Technical School, and writing firmly to the Land Officer and the Director of Public Works to exert 'the necessary energy' to get going. His Highness the Kabaka of Buganda arranged for the transfer of land—the top of Makerere Hill proper was, as it still is, occupied by a school and church belonging to the Native Anglican Church. Douglas Tomblings, Acting Principal, in his report for 1924, says because of the difficulties of building on the site acquired at the bottom of the Hill: 'It is therefore an urgent necessity to obtain as much of the Makerere Hill as can possibly be purchased.' A further fifteen acres had already been acquired and negotiations were going ahead for more, but the area of 191½ acres at the bottom and on the slopes of the Hill, which had been acquired by 1925, was felt to be adequate for a considerable expansion<sup>1</sup> at the time, when H. O. Saville published a plan for the development of Makerere Hill, with a normal school, agricultural plots, playing fields, department offices and a timber plantation. As an aside, it is interesting that even at this early date provision was made for classrooms for postgraduate work, as well as for elementary, intermediate and technical schools. Tomblings had even two years earlier foreseen the need for a swimming pool, which did not actually materialize until 1961.

In September 1920, the Secretary of State, Winston Churchill, approved the establishment of a 'native technical school at Kampala'. A Technical School Board was set up and work began on temporary buildings. W. S. Hanson of the Public Works Department was selected to be instructor, and J. Sykes, for many years Master of Method at Makerere,

### *They Built for the Future*

writes of him, 'In one sense he was the real founder of the College, as he was the first European to work on the Hill. He arrived on 1st March 1921, the day on which operations in connection with the inception of the Uganda Technical College began.' Accompanied by Matayo Sempala and Erasito Tabyetise (both of whom were instructors, first at Makerere and then at the Kampala Technical School) he cut the first sod and began work on temporary classrooms and quarters. A Board of Governors was set up and, with H. O. Saville ('Beaver' Saville, also of the Public Works Department) as Superintendent, plans for permanent buildings were drawn up, with the assistance of Lt.-Commander Callwall, who is remembered more for his many years' work in Toro at Nyakasura School. These plans were immediately accepted and authority was given for the permanent buildings necessary. But the College began before these buildings. In January 1922, the first fourteen day boys began to study carpentry, building and mechanics. (In point of fact there were fewer at first, but this was the final number for the year.) The fees were 60s. for day boys, but already 250s. a year had been fixed for the boarding fee. The aim was to make the fees cover all working expenses, although some boys might not be able to afford this, and local governments were encouraged to offer scholarships to overcome this difficulty. It seems fantastic now to imagine that this income could cover working expenses but, even in 1936, the Bursar estimated that a student's rations for the week cost *shs.* 2.75*cts.*, and that the cost per year, including rations, clothing and lighting, was £9; this did not include staff salaries, which put the cost up to approximately £80.

Although the College began with day students it aimed from the beginning at being a boarding establishment. Over 90 per cent of the first batch of boys could not understand English and had come from central schools with only a primary education behind them. The vexed question in the College, as in the country for some time to come, was whether instruction should be in Luganda or Swahili. But it is an example of the continuity of which Makerere should be proud that many

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10670-2 - They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College 1922-1962

Margaret Macpherson

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The Site, 1921–25*

of these founder students are members of the Makerere College Union Society (the organization of old students of the College), regular attendants at reunions and proud of their connection with Makerere; some of them have been followed by their sons and daughters at the College.

The horizon began to broaden at once. Obviously there was a need for much more than a technical school and it is significant that, as early as August 1922, the name of the College was changed from the Uganda Technical College to Makerere College. Saville wrote in his first annual report:<sup>1</sup>

It was considered that the term technical was not broad enough to include all the vocational training it is designed to give and hence it was considered better to drop that epithet; moreover it was felt that the use of the name Uganda might be misconstrued to mean the kingdom of Uganda in particular, rather than the whole Protectorate. The intention has always been that this College should be for the benefit of every tribe in the Protectorate and that every encouragement should be given to the outlying tribes to send in students for training. Hence the necessity for the choice of a name with no divisional significance.<sup>2</sup>

It was Sir Robert Coryndon who finally fixed the name, and there is a red ink note on a letter on the subject saying, ‘Why not call it Makelele?’ Makerere Hill proper was not in the possession of the College at this time. The land on which the permanent buildings were going up was known as Kagugube, the name of the busy market that had once flourished under the remarkable ‘heron’ tree on the College boundaries, but it was already seen that expansion might go beyond this point. Now it is little remembered that the College flourished at Kagugube, that the sports fields of that time (now the site of the main administration building and its neighbours) were called Semakokiro, and the area occupied by the normal school, whose buildings were later adapted as the first laboratories, was once known as Nyanjeradde. The meanings of all these names are interesting. What Snoxall says, in the *Uganda Journal*,<sup>3</sup> may be true:

The origin of the name is now often merely a question for surmise. . . . It is not sufficient to record that a Kabaka said or did something,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10670-2 - They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College  
1922-1962

Margaret Macpherson

Excerpt

[More information](#)*They Built for the Future*

though that is all we shall probably be able to find out now of a number of places, where actually if oral tradition had preserved the story as well as it has preserved much of its country's history, we should know the name of the actual Kabaka concerned and clan history might have given us further details.

But some of the tales concerning these various names have sufficient detail to argue quite a strong tradition of royal connections with the College Hill. Kagugube, the market under the tree, was said to be the scene of a momentary drama when a messenger sent by Kabaka Mwanga to buy goods from the Mukama of Bunyoro sat stubbornly in the market and refused to deliver the king's goods on his return. The Luganda word for to refuse stubbornly is *okuguguba* and Kagugube means the place of stubborn refusal.<sup>1</sup> Semakokiro is the name of the Kabaka who set up his palace on this Hill (each Kabaka chose his own palace site), and the more convincing of the two versions of why the comparatively flat area half-way up the Hill was called Nyanjeradde, is also connected with this Kabaka. It is said that his courtyards were made particularly smooth and flat and chalked so that they resembled a stretch of calm water. 'Nyanja erade' might mean 'the lake has calmed'. The other version is also rather charming. A Kabaka returning from a long safari out of sight of Lake Victoria came over the brow of the Hill and saw water again and greeted it joyfully, 'Nyanja erade'.<sup>2</sup>

The Hill was the hill of the royal blacksmiths, and Mr Michael Nsimbi, an expert on Ganda traditions, is the authority for the story of how it came to be called Makerere:

The name Makerere was given to the hill by King Jjuuko who is thought to have reigned about the year 1680 and he is number sixteen among the Kings of Buganda. One day, Jjuuko set out on a journey to go to a village called Nabutiti, in the north of Kyadondo, to betroth a girl who became popular as Nalunga, wife of Jjuuko. . . . During his journey to Nabutiti, dawn found Jjuuko on the hill now known as Makerere. Jjuuko, who intended to go far before it dawned, was annoyed to find that dawn overtook him so soon. In his annoyance, Jjuuko ejaculated the word, 'Makerere'. From then the hill came to be known as Makerere.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Site, 1921–25*

Presumably, as he climbed the western slope of the Hill, he had thought the sunrise further off than in fact it was, and was annoyed when he came over the top and found it was up.<sup>1</sup>

The first advance came in medicine. In 1906 the incidence of venereal disease in Buganda was so great that an appeal to the Colonial Office for advice and assistance was made. Col. Lambkin of the R.A.M.C. advised a commission of three R.A.M.C. officers under the leadership of Capt. G. J. Keane, later Major and Director of Medical Services, and this commission set to work on a mass treatment of the population, working from Kampala, Mityana and Masaka, and then at further centres. The Kampala work was based on Mulago Hill from 1913, and from being the headquarters of the anti-venereal campaign, it became a hospital, with sub-dispensaries spread throughout the country. It was obviously necessary to train African staff to work this embryo medical service, although, standards of education being so very low, this training had to be of a strictly practical and limited nature.

During the war the African staff then in training formed the nucleus of the African Native Medical Corps, under Major Keane, and during the next four years many young men from Uganda received a form of medical training; on the return of peace, when normal activities were resumed, many of them returned to the civil hospitals and dispensaries. Mulago grew into a general hospital and medical training became wider in scope, no longer restricted to the treatment of venereal disease. By 1923, medical assistants of a low grade were being trained in Mulago (as well as at the C.M.S. hospital at Mengo), but the opening of Makerere seemed to make possible the training of boys of a higher educational standard than had so far been available. Major Keane, another builder for the future, had long seen the need for such a training and had faith that it would be possible, and so in this same year a scheme for medical training was put into action. Dr H. B. Owen, who had retired from the medical service, was recalled to become first Medical Tutor at the College.<sup>2</sup> Patiently going forward step by step, in the first instance compiling simple notes and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10670-2 - They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College  
1922-1962

Margaret Macpherson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

### *They Built for the Future*

working towards a stage at which his students could assimilate simple text-books, grounding them in physics, biology and chemistry, he moved them on to the pre-clinical subjects and got them in two years to the stage when they could move over to Mulago for clinical work. It was one of the amazing one-man shows in the history of the College, for although he called in medical officers and laboratory assistants for the clinical work, it remained his inspiration that made the scheme work and expand fairly rapidly. It is important to realize what a lift to College planning the introduction of medical courses at this early period gave.

In 1923 another course was introduced: in survey. And in the following year the plan to include engineering and agriculture was implemented, and the first students began these courses. The one agricultural student took his Preliminary Science course with the four medical students, instruction being entirely in English and the results described as 'satisfactory, interpretation not being required'.<sup>1</sup> The first surveyors spent six months at Makerere under Mr Saville before going out on field-work with the Survey Department. Engineering, to begin with, was motor engineering, although it was hoped when staff were available to allow for an expanded programme of instruction. The first students, six of them, were given a free extra year (they had begun at the College in 1922) because it was felt that they had not been adequately grounded. All through these early years the co-operation of Government departments was sought and most generously given. Entrance examinations were held throughout the country and now divided into two parts—a senior for the semi-professional courses and a junior for the technical ones. In 1923, the Governor, Sir Geoffrey Archer, opened the first permanent building, the 'Big School', the foundation stone of which he himself had laid the previous year, and said in his speech that the aim was a College of 340 boys, an immense number it seemed then.

Conferences were held during this year on the question of the future education policy, and the Phelps Stokes Com-



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10670-2 - They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College 1922-1962

Margaret Macpherson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

### *The Site, 1921–25*

mission strongly recommended active Government participation in education at all levels rather than the existing benevolent interest, whereby Government maintained one college, Makerere, and otherwise sat back and let the missions get on with it. There had been a demand from the people for a coherent system as early as 1921 (Kenya had had an Education Department since 1911), and E. R. J. Hussey, who in 1924 was in the Sudan, came down and gave valuable advice before returning, in 1925, as Uganda's first Director of Education. Douglas Tomblings, a District Commissioner of long standing in Uganda, was acting as Principal during this year and it was already planned that a separate institution for technical education should be started, leaving Makerere free to concentrate on vocational training courses.

In 1925 Saville left Makerere to take charge of technical education and Tomblings became Principal. To pick up our building image again, we may say the site had been cleared and foundations could be begun. It is typical of the unforeseen speed with which education was to advance in East Africa that, in a matter of three years, what had begun as a technical college for the training of artisans should have gone so far that, in the first report of the Education Department in 1925, Makerere is described as 'destined to become the University College for the Protectorate'.<sup>1</sup>

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10670-2 - They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College 1922-1962

Margaret Macpherson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CHAPTER II

## THE FOUNDATIONS, 1925-39

'This is not a new College as has been mistakenly represented but the logical growth of an Institution started by the Government in 1921—a College which looks back on a tradition of very rapid progress.'

THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER: *East African Dinner, London, 1938*

The next few years at Makerere were of solid 'slog', as the digging of foundations very often are. Frequently the College was called upon to meet an educational emergency, to take upon itself an almost *ad hoc* course because it was felt that something must be done and Makerere must do it. Constantly it was short of staff, short of building materials, short of cash to make necessary repairs, but, as one looks through the reports and college syllabuses, and even the notices about games, physical training and cross country runs, one sees an organization taking shape, becoming an integrated community, a college developing a sense of loyalty and pride in itself.

Medicine, survey, agriculture, mechanics and carpentry continued to progress and a two-year course for schoolmasters was begun in September 1925. Nearly all the first 23 'schoolmasters' were already teachers and this was an urgent measure to improve as quickly as possible the general level of education and teaching methods in the intermediate schools. The Principal also planned to begin in the following year the first general education course in the College. This was to follow the pattern already established at Budo and Kisubi and was partly to ensure an adequate supply of good students for the various vocational courses, since boys from other schools seemed somewhat unenthusiastic about entering upon further studies instead of beginning to earn their living right away.

In 1926 the schoolmasters' course was in full swing, the Intermediate B course was a class of 21, taking science, history, geography, mathematics and all branches of English. The 1926