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GAMBIA.

Report for 1924.

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GAMBIA.

ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT, 1924.*

Preface.

The first descriptive accounts of the Gambia River date from the middle of the 15th century when Cada Mosto, a Venetian, visited the river in charge of an expedition fitted out by Prince Henry of Portugal. He appears to have travelled some forty miles from the mouth in 1456. The Portuguese were able to maintain a monopoly of the trade for more than a century; an English expedition fitted out in 1481 was prevented from sailing by the influence of King John II of Portugal. In 1588, a Patent from Queen Elizabeth gave certain merchants of Devon and London a monopoly for ten years of the "free and whole trafique trade and feat of merchandise" to and within the Senegal and Gambia rivers. It was stated in the Patent that one voyage had already been performed. The second voyage under the charter which was made in 1591 is described in Hakluyt. The French, it appears, had then traded in these parts for above thirty years, but the "Frenchmen never used to go into the river of Gambia which is a river of secret trade and riches concealed by the Portugals." The power of Portugal was then on the wane, and early in the 17th century the English established themselves in the Gambia and the French in Senegal to the north. For the following two centuries these countries contended with varying fortunes for the mastery of the two rivers, the coast ports between, and the trade of the hinterland.

In the 18th century the Royal African Company controlled the commerce of the Gambia, and made large profits on their cargoes of slaves and gold and ivory and beeswax.

Chartered Company administration, however, was ruined by the Act of 1807, which abolished the slave trade, and although an annual subsidy of £23,000 was paid to the Company, it was unable to make a profit, and its assets were taken over by the Crown. Since 1816 the seat of Government has been at Bathurst, which was founded by the English merchants who left Senegal and the Island of Goree when those territories were restored to France after the Napoleonic wars. It was named after the then Secretary of State for the Colonies.

* NOTE.—A sketch map will be found in the Report for 1914, No. 861 [Cd. 7622-53].

I.—Government Finance.

The Revenue and Expenditure for the last five years have been :—

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Revenue.</i>	<i>Expenditure.</i>	<i>Excess of Assets over Liabilities.</i>
	£	£	£
1920 ...	268,788	171,160	328,657
1921 ...	183,201	225,461	286,396
1922 ...	204,244	430,312 (a)	99,687
1923 ...	407,581 (b)	211,316	295,951
1924 ...	208,613	203,635	300,929

(a) includes £187,893 loss on demonetization of five franc pieces.

(b) includes £177,893 part of loan from West African Currency Board.

Customs receipts, which represent 64 per cent. of the total revenue of the Colony, brought in £133,425 against £161,877 the year before. Out of this sum the four chief items showed the following reductions on 1923 returns :—

	1924.	1923.
	£	£
Groundnuts ...	57,572	60,622
Kola nuts ...	29,231	37,301
<i>Ad valorem</i> duties ...	18,867	36,515
Tobacco ...	11,172	15,368

The large decrease of £17,648 in *ad valorem* duties is accounted for, as to £15,022 by a reduction in the importation of cotton goods owing to large stocks being held at the beginning of the year; as to the balance by the new classification of certain items formerly on an *ad valorem* basis, now dutiable at a specific rate.

Light dues at the rate of a shilling a ton have been charged on all vessels laden with cargo for Bathurst since the beginning of the year and with Buoyage and Wharfage dues have yielded £3,914.

£22,000 was paid as part redemption of the loan from the West African Currency Board. The original debt has now been reduced to £125,893.

II.—Trade and Agriculture.*(a) TRADE.*

The following table shows the balance of trade exclusive of specie during the last three years :—

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Imports.</i>	<i>Exports.</i>	<i>Balance of Exports over Imports.</i>
	£	£	£
1922 ...	653,421	807,844	154,423
1923 ...	790,013	884,309	94,296
1924 ...	669,700	893,359	223,659

Imports.

The difference in the value of imports between 1921 and 1923 is mainly due to cotton piece-goods, of which only 2,947,529 yards, valued at £104,893, were imported, as against 8,476,219 yards valued at £232,770 in 1923.

In spite of the crops grown locally in the river swamps, a large quantity of imported rice was consumed in 1924 amounting to 7,490 tons, valued at £126,982, compared with 4,606 tons the previous year.

The United States continue to supply most of the non-edible oils, of which nearly 30,000 gallons more than last year were brought in.

87.76 per cent. of wines came from France as well as most of the biscuits, flour, sugar and soap.

The British share of the import trade, 54.31 per cent., was 15.16 per cent. less than that of 1923, France coming second with 16.97 per cent. and Germany third with 15.75 per cent.

Exports.

Of the total value of exports, groundnuts account for 96.48 per cent.; 54.12 per cent. went to England, and 33.79 per cent. to France. The low price of £10 a ton or 2s. 6d. a bushel offered to the farmers by the merchants in January at the commencement of the buying season, when more attractive prices were offered by their French competitors in Senegal, was perhaps the main factor in the crop being smaller than usual. Liverpool quotations for Gambia groundnuts averaged 4s. 3d. a bushel.

(b) AGRICULTURE.

The work of laying out the new Agricultural and Botanical Station at Cape St. Mary, began on 1st January and, by the end of June, 16 acres of bush land had been hand-ploughed or forked.

Plant nurseries have been established and two large glass houses have been built for raising special economic plants. A section of land has been divided into ten quarter-acre plots for ascertaining the manurial requirements of the groundnut.

Zaria, Philippine Red, Dixie Grant, Senegal and local varieties of nuts are being sown for experiment. A fumigatorium has been built on the station for the purpose of dealing with all imported plants and seeds.

Agricultural conditions in the Gambia differ mainly from those of other West African Colonies owing to the absence of hinterland. Practically the whole of the Protectorate lands consist of a narrow strip of low-lying land, six and a quarter miles broad, following the Gambia River along its course on either bank for a distance of 250 miles.

The population, which is unevenly distributed in the Protectorate, is 210,530, or 51 to the square mile.

Effective labour is to a large extent migratory and is diminishing as the following return of " Strange Farmers " for the last five years shows :—

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Strange Farmers.</i>
1920	24,150
1921	22,058
1922	20,566
1923	17,383
1924	14,188

One cause of the decrease was attributed to the unsatisfactory system of produce inspection which has now been discontinued, but it is an undoubted fact that railway construction in Senegal, which will eventually enclose the Protectorate, has much to do with the dwindling numbers of " Strange Farmers " who enter the Protectorate each year to cultivate groundnuts and return to their homes with the proceeds of their labours. Instead of the system of inspection compulsory screening of nuts has been established with most satisfactory results.

Sixty-three buying stations have carried on business, as against seventy-five in the previous season.

It is hoped that with careful selection of seed the crops in future years will surpass in quantity, as they already do in quality, those of the past.

The tonnage and values of the last five years have been :—

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Tonnage.</i>	<i>Value.</i>
		£
1920	84,037	2,322,032
1921	59,175	628,901
1922	61,800	780,889
1923	61,178	864,885
1924	60,622	861,925

Palm kernels have given better results than last year, 678 tons of a value of £10,571 having been exported, as against 392 tons of a value of £5,640 in 1923. The oil palm is being destroyed by bush fires and the mature palms are being exterminated by over-tapping for palm wine. Unless prompt action is taken palm kernels will, as in the case of rubber, cease to appear in the exports, but the difficulty of enforcing the prohibition of tapping the palms is obvious.

The lime tree is found growing under semi-wild conditions in the Protectorate and experiments are being made at Cape St. Mary with a view to the establishment of an industry in this fruit in the Gambia.

III.—Land and Climate.*(a) LAND.*

Ownership is hereditary in the Protectorate. Where land is not held or claimed by a native, it can be rented from the Government for a term, but freehold rights are not given. The land belongs to the people and each farmer is really the owner, so long as he continues to cultivate it.

Forests are non-existent and there are no European plantations.

A survey was made at Chargi in the South Bank Province in connection with a frontier dispute, and the line was delimited by iron pickets for later investigation by a Boundary Commission.

About 50 surveys for issue of title were made during the year and 161 titles were entered, consisting of 42 grants in fee simple (41 of them in Bathurst on old land applications), 104 leases and 15 wharf licences.

The rent roll of the Government in 1924 was £5,140.

(b) CLIMATE.

Meteorological returns for Bathurst and Georgetown are as follows :—

	Average max. shade.	Average min. shade.	Range.	Mean.	Rainfall in inches.
Bathurst ...	92·5	63·7	29	78·1	56·46
Georgetown ...	100·6	66·6	34	83·6	47·01

The highest maximum shade temperature was 110° F. in April at Georgetown.

The heaviest rainfall in one month was 26·14 inches in August at Bathurst.

The average of rainfall in Bathurst during the last 40 years has been :—

1884-1894 ...	...	...	...	51·56 inches.
1895-1904 ...	...	...	...	46·97 ,,
1905-1914 ...	...	...	...	44·47 ,,
1915-1924 ...	...	...	...	45·35 ,,

Though considerably above the average of the last 40 years, the total rainfall in 1924 was nine inches less than in 1923. The figures for the last five years being :—

1920 ...	...	...	...	34·29 inches.
1921 ...	...	...	...	35·12 ,,
1922 ...	...	...	...	45·71 ,,
1923 ...	...	...	...	65·38 ,,
1924 ...	...	...	...	56·46 ,,

IV.—Education.

During the year 1924 there were 1,688 children on the register of the elementary schools of the Gambia, 218 of whom attended the Mohammedan school and 82 the schools at Georgetown.

There are secondary schools also, maintained by the Wesleyans, and a Roman Catholic school for girls. The Gambia children are not less intelligent than their brothers and sisters in other Colonies, but indifferent teaching prevents most of them from attaining a satisfactory standard, apart from the fact that parents too often take their sons and daughters up river with them during the trading season and often remove them from school at an early age to work in the home.

The school attendance was again bad this year mainly owing to sickness and the inclement weather experienced during the rains.

Two medical inspections were carried out and physical exercises have been taken up with keen interest.

A football competition has caused immense enthusiasm amongst the scholars, but none of the schools have adequate playgrounds. It is unfortunate that when they were built years ago sufficient space was not allowed for recreation purposes.

It is hoped that the reclamation scheme will provide a remedy.

The results of the annual examinations were not as good as last year, especially so in hygiene.

At the teachers' examination there was only one successful candidate out of 12.

School libraries have been started so that the older children now have the chance of reading standard authors.

Two boys at present hold scholarships from the Government and are being educated at Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone.

V.—Communications.*(a) SHIPPING.*

The total of British, French, American, and German tonnage during the last four years has been :—

<i>Year.</i>	<i>British.</i>	<i>French.</i>	<i>American.</i>	<i>German.</i>	<i>Total.</i>
1921 ...	440,522	55,663	66,896	16,648	688,740
1922 ...	556,283	81,358	22,365	67,998	835,663
1923 ...	593,772	100,486	60,126	165,804	1,052,892
1924 ...	643,796	92,369	93,446	158,060	1,100,729

(b) MARINE DEPARTMENT.

The steamer " Prince of Wales," which was purchased by the Government in 1922, made 25 trips up the river during the

year, covering a distance of 12,760 miles. The "Prince of Wales" and "Vampire" run a regular service, the latter having made 23 trips with a total distance run of 11,530 miles.

Both vessels are well patronised for passenger traffic and freight.

Repairs of any importance have to be done at Dakar, but, when the slipway at Bathurst has been built, it will be possible to accommodate ships up to 400 tons.

The Marine Workshop and Store, close to the site of the slipway, was finished towards the end of the year and the machinery installed. The Department is now training its own apprentice engineers, both afloat and in the workshop.

The lighted buoys at the entrance of the river have worked well and are brought in every six months for testing and overhaul.

(c) POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS DEPARTMENT.

The correspondence dealt with during the past year shows a gradual rise.

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Number of Articles (letters, postcards, etc.)</i>
1921	192,049
1922	208,938
1923	219,104
1924	229,938

6,681 parcels were received and despatched.

New steel call boxes have been provided at the Bathurst Post Office and are a great improvement on the old wooden type.

Money orders to the amount of £15,079 and postal orders to the amount of £6,871 were issued from the four land offices and the two travelling post offices on the "Prince of Wales" and "Vampire."

The Savings Bank deposits have fallen to £1,509, the lowest figure recorded in the past 25 years.

Wireless communication with Georgetown has been carried on throughout the year. The station at Basse was closed down during the rains. 2,231 messages in all were sent.

The new Central Battery Telephone system is now in good working order and 75 telephones have been installed.

VI.—The Protectorate.

Formerly it was said that one farm of nuts bought two of corn, but to-day the value of corn is proportionately so much higher that more corn and less nuts have been grown in some parts of the Provinces.

In the North Bank Province, village seed-nut stores have been built with good results. Every farmer at harvest time puts in three measures and just before the rains he receives back two for planting. The third belongs to the village and is distributed by the Headman.

In Kombo nuts are now bought by weight instead of by the bushel. The innovation has proved unpopular as the majority of farmers only understand the bushel measures and are quite ignorant of the use of scales. Now that Bathurst merchants send lorries to transport the nuts, many donkeys have been sold into French country. They, as well as the Kombo cattle, have again been gradually increasing in numbers, but it will be many years before the herds approach in size those which were seen before the plague in 1917.

At McCarthy Island the mainland groundnut trade from Georgetown has almost ceased on account of lighters and cutters being no longer employed by the merchants to transport nuts from the mainland villages of the South Bank Province to that town.

A chain ferry at Boraba is under consideration, as better prices are obtainable at Georgetown than in the neighbouring district.

The importance of Georgetown has been eclipsed of recent years by Kuntaur, which is the principal up-river shipping port. The depth of the stream here allows ocean-going steamers to come right alongside the wharves. The place, which contains only a few hundred people at other times, swells into a town of several thousand inhabitants during the trading season and presents a problem in regard to sanitation which the authorities are taking steps to solve.

VII.—Vital Statistics and Sanitation.

(a) STATISTICS.

In Bathurst there are 218 Europeans and 9,741 Africans and Syrians. 291 births were recorded during the year and 513 deaths, giving a birth and death rate of 30.90 and 52.66 per thousand respectively.

The infant mortality rate was 471 per thousand, as against 498 in 1923.

(b) PUBLIC HEALTH.

Five cases of smallpox occurred, but none of plague in any part of the Colony or Protectorate.

Throughout the year an intensive campaign against rats was carried on in Bathurst. Rat infestation of all premises is now compulsorily notifiable.

Sand filling operations at the Cemetery have provided a large area of new burying ground and have also obliterated mosquito breeding places which have contributed largely to malaria in Bathurst.

(c) MEDICAL.

In-patients at the Colonial Hospital numbered 605, out-patients 13,609.

A Medical Officer and a Dispenser are stationed at Georgetown and a Dispenser at the West African Frontier Force cantonments; the rest of the medical staff are at headquarters.

Since the correction of the dietary at the Gaol, no cases of beri-beri have occurred, so that it is justifiable to claim that the "nutritional" theory is sound.

A serious outbreak of epidemic, diagnosed as relapsing fever, broke out in three villages in the North Bank Province, causing the deaths of 685 people out of a total of 2,790.

VIII.—Judicial.

(a) CRIMINAL STATISTICS.

The Supreme Court disposed of 33 cases, as against 38 in 1923.

Twenty-five of them were for offences against property, nine of which were traders' cases under the Criminal Law Ordinance of 1855. An unusual charge was that against a woman who was convicted of forging a cheque.

In the Police Court there was a considerable increase in the number of persons brought up. Larceny and cognate offences still figure far too prominently. The number of summonses for default in payment of local rates was chiefly due to trade depression.

In the Protectorate Tribunals the commonest offences are assaults, petty larceny and cattle thefts.

Fines, as usual, continue to be the general form of penalty inflicted.

(b) LEGISLATION.

Twenty-one Ordinances were passed in 1924.

The most important were those dealing with Customs, the Adulteration of Produce, and the Repatriation of Aliens. The Adulteration of Produce Ordinance deals with compulsory screening of nuts.

Regulations concerning public health, the police, and motor traffic were made by the Governor in Council.

(c) POLICE.

Four sub-inspectors, appointed early in the year, have added to the efficiency of the Force, which has been maintained at the authorised strength of 2 Officers, 8 Warrant Officers and 146 N.C.O.s and men.

Six boys were taken on as band apprentices. They have been taught music by the Bandmaster and, considering the time they have been under tuition, they play extraordinarily well.

A section of constables are trained as firemen, but no fires of a serious nature occurred during the 12 months under review.

No case of drunkenness was reported in any of the 17 premises licensed for the sale of liquor.

The Domestic Servants Registration Ordinance, which has been in force since 1922, is carried out by the Police and has had beneficial results.

During the whole of 1924 only one case of theft was brought against a registered servant by his master out of 308 on the books.

(d) PRISON.

Three hundred prisoners were admitted, with a daily average of 102. Their health has been much improved by the use of unpolished rice and vegetables from the prison garden.

A female prison has been added and quarters for the matron.

The prisoners are employed on public works, wood cutting and splitting, gardening, and cleaning of Government buildings and grounds.

IX.—Public Works.

The four large schemes for Bathurst, namely, Drainage, Fire Protection, Electric Light, and Slipway, have progressed so slowly that the construction stage will not be reached until next year.

The drainage scheme includes the purchase of a dredger and the raising of low-lying areas about 2 feet above low-tide level. These areas have always been subject to flooding during the rainy season and it is proposed to remove the inhabitants of the tidal swamp areas and to provide accommodation for them in the reclaimed area of some 25 acres at Half Die.

The protection of Bathurst against fire has been a matter of urgency for long past. It has now been decided to raise the pressure in the Bathurst water mains by the use of pumps. The normal pressure in, and capacity of, the mains is inadequate for this purpose. A continuous supply of water will be ensured by the provision of a tank of 150,000 gallons capacity.

The installation of an electric light and power plant capable of meeting the public and private demands for electricity in Bathurst has been prepared for by the conversion of the Gaol into a central power-house to hold two alternators of 100 kilowatts and one alternator of 50 kilowatts, the machines being coupled direct to semi-Diesel oil engines. Distribution will be by overhead network supplying current at 220 volts with 440 volts between outer wires.

The Slipway at Half Die is designed to deal with ships up to 150 feet in length and of 400 tons dead weight. The attempt to build a slipway in 1914 was rendered abortive by the insecurity of the foundations. Careful investigations and borings have therefore been made during the year to ensure the safety of the superstructure.

The supply of labour, both skilled and unskilled, has been adequate, there being no large works in the Colony to cause a shortage.

The rate of wages of unskilled labour remained constant, while that of skilled labour fell slightly. Whenever possible, work has been done by piece work or petty contract, rather than by day wage labour.

This system has been adopted in the making of furniture from "Conta" wood specially imported from Sierra Leone, there being little suitable wood in the Gambia. It was feared that good cabinet work would be rather beyond the ability of the local native carpenter, but the result has proved otherwise and it is anticipated that the furniture made in the Public Works Department will stand the climate better than the inferior and more expensive imported oak and pine suites.

X.—General.

Three calls were made during the year by the gunboats "Thistle" and "Dwarf," and a short visit was paid by the French man-of-war "Cassiopee."

A successful celebration of Empire Day included an assembly in McCarthy Square of the children attending the various schools in Bathurst, together with the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, and Brownies. Athletic sports of a more ambitious nature than formerly were held in the afternoon. The Wesleyans once more obtained the majority of prizes and the Championship flag.

The Reading and Recreation Room for the African Community in the centre of the town, opened by the Government in 1922, was closed as it was hardly ever used by those for whom it was intended. The premises have been handed over to the Public Health Department, and their offices in Buckle Street are now used as the headquarters of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides.

Part of the old Secretariat has been turned into a Club. Its proximity to the tennis courts makes it a convenient social centre for the town. Accommodation for the staff has been increased by the purchase of an old stone residence in Leman Street.

An incident worthy of mention is the retirement in perfect health of Monsieur Bourquin after forty years' service in Bathurst with the firm of Maurel Frères.

C. R. M. WORKMAN,
Colonial Secretary.

Bathurst, Gambia,
26th May, 1925.

The following Appendices are printed :—

- (1) Work conducted at the Imperial Institute during the year 1924 for the Colony of the Gambia.
- (2) List of principal firms trading in the Gambia.
- (3) List of Barristers, Solicitors and Patent Agents.

PUBLICATIONS ON THE GAMBIA.

"The Gambia Colony," E. B. Archer (St. Bride's Press), 1905.

"The Gambia," H. Reeve (Smith, Elder), 1912.

Annual Trade Report of the Colony, 1923, obtainable from the Crown Agents.

Appendix I.

WORK CONDUCTED AT THE IMPERIAL INSTITUTE DURING THE YEAR 1924 FOR THE GAMBIA.

Economic Investigations and Enquiries.

During 1924 the following investigations and enquiries were carried out for the Government of the Gambia:—

“Oysters” from Bintang Creek.—In continuation of the previous enquiry relating to the “oysters” occurring at the Bintang Creek on the Gambia River, two further sets of specimens were received during 1924. These “oysters,” after being salted and dried, are sold in the Bathurst market, but enquiries made by the Imperial Institute in 1921 showed that they would not be saleable in the United Kingdom. It was, however, of interest to establish their identity, and on referring the first specimens to the Natural History Museum it was ascertained that they were not oysters but probably belonged to the group to which the ark-shells (*Arcidae*) are referred. Further specimens were therefore requested, and three further sets since received from Bintang Creek have each been identified at the Museum as a species of oyster (*Ostrea parasitica*, Gmelin). Another set of specimens obtained from the Gambia River, about a mile above McCarthy Island, were identified at the Museum as a species of *Aetheria* (probably *A. elliptica*), a fresh-water genus which is widely distributed in Africa.

Groundnuts.—In connection with efforts of the Agricultural Department to improve the quality of the groundnut crop, an enquiry was received from the Department regarding the high percentage of free fatty acids in certain consignments imported into the United Kingdom. The high average of 4.75 per cent. in last year's crop was probably due to the causes mentioned by the Department, viz., the exceptionally heavy rainfall and the prevalence of the fungus *Cercospora personata*. The unusually high figure of 12½ per cent. reported in the case of certain shipments was, however, probably due mainly to the presence of unsound nuts, consisting of rotten nuts, which were said to have been mixed with the sound nuts, and nuts which had suffered from being stored under moist, warm conditions. At the suggestion of the Institute a number of representative samples of Gambia groundnuts were subsequently forwarded in connection with this enquiry and were under examination at the close of the year.

Elephant Grass. In view of the fact that elephant grass is abundant in the Gambia, an enquiry was received from the Director of the Agricultural Department regarding its utilisation for paper-making. In reply, information was supplied regarding investigations carried out at the Institute with elephant grass from other parts of Africa which indicated that the stems are quite satisfactory for paper-making but that they could not be exported profitably for the purpose. If, however, a pulp-mill were established in the country of origin for the preparation of paper-pulp from the grass it should be possible to market the pulp in Europe in competition with wood-pulp.

Other enquiries dealt with related to the general conditions of life in the Colony.

British Empire Exhibition.

The Imperial Institute was allotted space in H.M. Government Pavilion at Wembley for an exhibit to illustrate its work in promoting the utilisation of the raw materials of the Empire. The nature and scope of the investigations carried out were indicated by selected examples from each of the principal groups of raw materials. A