

HISTORY OF METHODIST COLLEGE UZUAKOLI

The Rev W. Christie and the Rev G. Hanney of the primitive Methodist Missionary society, accompanied by the Rev W. Collins of the United Free Church, made a reconnaissance of Bende from Ikot Ekpene in 1909. The Reverend Fredric William Dodds took over from Reverend Christie in 1910. Teachers were sent to teach the converts. These teachers doubled as both preachers on Sunday services and teachers for pupils on week days. These boys could not go far as there were no qualified teachers at the time. Rev Dodds took some boys in Ibo land namely, Ndubueze Ogbonna of Uzuakoli, Oji Iheukwumere of Uzuakoli, JAN Okereke of Ngoro and Chima Nwana of Arondizuogu to the Methodist Boys School at Oron, to continue their education.

It was soon discovered that many Ibo boys were in Oron. They had to travel on foot from their various locations to Bende and go on to join boats that will take them to Oron. The church began to think. It became a topical issue in the various Eastern District Synods of the Methodist church to build a school for Ibo boys situated in the Ibo heartland. The railway line from Port Harcourt passed through Uzuakoli in 1915 and soon trains bustled across Uzuakoli from Port Harcourt to Enugu. Uzuakoli was decided to be the site for Ibo Boys Institute. Rev. Banham was placed to be in charge of the buildings.

The first students were admitted in January 1923. They were drawn from pupils who were already in standard four in Methodist Central School Ngoro, Methodist Central School, Ovim and the Methodist Town School, Uzuakoli. The Headmaster of Ngoro was J.A.N. Okereke while that of Ovim was Mr (later Rev) Chima Nwana. The church teachers and the roving missionaries formed the teaching staff of the Town School Uzuakoli. All the standard four boys in Ngoro, Ovim and all the pupils in the Town school formed a majority of the initial intake into the college in January 1923.

The Rev. J.B. Hardy and some indigenous teachers were the initial teachers. These included Messrs Oji Iheukwumere, Ndubueze Ogbonnaya and Isaac Egbonu. The site of the college was on the crest of a curving hill in a land that belongs to the people of Amamba, Uzuakoli. From the beginning, growth was upwards with secondary, teachers training classes and theological institution and downwards with the establishment of a demonstration (later practicing) school where pupils were better groomed and student teachers had their practical and criticism lessons. With time, expansion continued to take place; multiple streams like elementary teachers course, the higher elementary teachers course, the secondary school and the higher school became for some time, features of the complex institution. While some centres phased out, the higher elementary teachers' training college moved to a new site in Uzuakoli.

At first, the college was known as Ibo Boys Institute but later when students came from places beyond Iboland, eg. people from Cameroun, Fernanda Po, Efiks, Ijaws, Yorubas, Idomas, etc to the college, the name was changed to Uzuakoli Institute (U.I.). What was more unique about the college was enshrined in its first badge U.I. which meant Uzuakoli Institute but had an inner meaning of U before I or what H.L.O. Williams would call "la Politesse du Coeur", the politeness of the heart. Those who have not succeeded in acquiring these moral values of U before I and la Politesse du Coeur, are in his judgment, not really educated.

In 1933 and in the year 1936, the college made major strides that even surprised the conference of the primitive Methodist Society in England. In 1933, Dick Ogan passed the London

matriculation. He was the first person in the colleges in Iboland to achieve such feat. In the same year, Peter Nwana came first in an Igbo essay competition organised for teachers in Igbo land. That essay was transformed into the Igbo classic, “Ómenuko”.

In 1936, Henry Kanu Offonry came first in a civil service examination organized for students in Owerri province. Tragedy struck the college in 1934 when its scholar and first matriculant, Dick Udensi Ogan suddenly died. In his honour and memory, the Primitive Methodist Society in England funded the erection of a library known today as the Dick Ogan Memorial Library.

During the Second World War 1939 – 1945, the Government College Umuahia became a prisoner of war (POW) camp where German war prisoners were kept. The students of Government College were shared between Methodist College Uzuakoli and Dennis Memorial Grammar School (DMGS) Onitsha to continue their education. Students of Government College Umuahia met the house system where students had to cook their own food and loathed it. They began to tell Methodist College boys that where they came from, they had no business buying and cooking their own food. Bad company ruins good morals! The college, instigated by the Government college boys, staged a riot in 1945 calling for a full boarding system where cooks will be employed to cook for the students. The Eastern Nigeria Guardian aptly described the event as the Uzuakoli College debacle. This led to the stoppage of Uzuakoli College from sitting for the Cambridge school certificate examination for one or two years. The college imposed this discipline on the senior boys because they believed they instigated the junior ones to participate in the riot. Those who left Uzuakoli to Igbobi College broke records in the Cambridge school certificate examination. One of them, Dr Ogbonnaya Oti, who after his sojourn at Igbobi worked for some time in Lagos and travelled overseas where he qualified as specialist consultant surgeon is still alive at the time of writing this piece.

In 1955, the theological institute headed by the Rev. Hodgets was transferred to merge with other co-operating institutions to form the Trinity College, Umuahia. In 1956, a higher school section was attached to the college. Students were required to do two years after the Cambridge school cert in what was known as lower sixth and Upper sixth forms. They were thereafter required to sit for the higher school certificate (HSC) examinations. A principal pass in at least two out of the three principal subjects in the examination qualifies the holder to a direct University admission. It also reduced the number of years spent in university from four to three years.

In 1958, the Methodist Church in Britain, in collaboration with the Eastern Nigeria Government embarked on a scheme aimed at turning the college to a higher institution. To that end, land was acquired in the then Methodist High School. The land was ceded to the Methodist College by the Eastern Nigeria Government under Mr Clement Pleas. The plan was to transfer all secondary school students to the new site while Methodist College would be used for the experiment. In 1960 all form one boys admitted to the college were transferred to the new site. Teething problems facing the Eastern regional government could not allow her to perform her own part of the arrangement. The plan was suspended. The Higher Elementary Teachers College was transferred to the new site in 1964.

The Nigerian Civil War was a disaster to the college. Buildings were damaged, records, equipments, books collected and stored over the years were destroyed. However, the college remained in war as in peace time an important centre. It harboured during the war, scientists, engineers, chemists, technologists, biologists who engaged in research and production (RAP)

and manufactured such things as salt, matches, batteries, etc to contribute to the Biafran war effort.

The takeover of the college by the government, the long period of reconstruction and renovation compounded the problem of the college.

On the 24th day of September 2012, the Abia State Government handed over the college to the original owners, Methodist Church, Nigeria. The Old Boys Association of the College (UMCOBA) has in no small way, helped through building constructions and reconstructions; provision of vehicles and laboratory equipments; supply of books and awards of scholarships helped to restore the pre-war status, the past glory, scholarship and its discipline.

Over the one hundred years (100) of its existence, the following persons have had the opportunity of being the principals of the college. They include:

COLLEGE PRINCIPALS OVERSEEING ALL THE ARMS OF THE COLLEGE

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| 1. Rev. J.B. Hardy M.A.(Oxon) | 1922-1924 |
| 2. Rev H.L.O. Williams | 1924 – 1939 |
| 3. R.S.D Williams Esq.. | 1939 |
| 4. Rev W.J. Wood | 1939 – 1953 |
| 5. Rev. A.B. Macgar | 1953 – 1954 |
| 6. Rev. R. Kirkpatrick | 1954 |
| 7. W.H. Spray Esq. | 1954 – 1958 |

SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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|------------------------------------|--------------|
| 8. E.H. Long Boatom Esq. | 1946 – 1949 |
| 9. WHF Ashby Esq. | 1950 – 1953 |
| 10. U.U. Okure Esq. | 1954 – 1956 |
| 11. O.Onokala Esq. | 1958 |
| 12. Rev. E.B. Hall, MA (Cambridge) | 1959 – 1963 |
| 13. O. Onokala Esq. | 1964 – 1972 |
| 14. A.O. Anyaoha Esq. | 1973 – 1975 |
| 15. H.C. Ogbonnaya Esq BA (Lond.) | 1975 – 1978 |
| 16. G.UO. Uzoechi Esq. | 1978 – 1983 |
| 17. M.E. Onyebuchi Esq. | 1984 |
| 18. G.U. Nnochiri Esq. | 1985 |
| 19. E.N. Ukanwoke Esq. | 1985 – 1989 |
| 20. D.O.E. Akoma Esq. | 1989 – 1992 |
| 21. O.O. Omekara Esq. | 1992 |
| 22. Elechi Uche (KJW) | 1992 – 1994 |
| 23. I.O. Ezeala Esq. | 1994 – 1996 |
| 24. N.N. Ogbonnaya Esq. | 1996 – 2000 |
| 25. E.O. Chukwumerije Esq. | 2000 – 2006 |
| 26. C.C. Ndukwe Esq. | 2006 – 2008 |
| 27. M.N. Emezue Esq. | 2008 – 2012 |
| 28. V. Rev B.E. Okike | 2012 – 2018 |
| 29. V. Rev. Chinweuba Osuagwu | 2018 to date |