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Author(s): Gideon S. Were

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THE MAKING OF KAKAMEGA HIGH SCHOOL: A TRIBUTE TO HAROLD ARTHUR WATERLOO CHAPMAN*

Gideon S. Were

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Mr. Harold Arthur W. Chapman, who died on 25th January, 1988 was appointed the first Principal of the then Government African School Kakamega in August 1931. Initially, he had to stay with the Inspector of Schools, Nyanza Province, at Maragoli pending the completion of a suitable staff house at the school. A graduate of Oxford University, Chapman was destined to make history as Kakamega's longest-serving Headmaster this century. Apart from brief intervals when he was either on leave or on temporary assignments at Shimo-la-Tewa, Chadwick College (Butere) and Kisii before 1946, Chapman served as Kakamega's Principal up to 1955 when he retired. It is not surprising, therefore, that during that long and eventful period the name Chapman was synonymous with Government African School, Kakamega (which was later re-named Kakamega High School).

A fuller appreciation of Chapman's contribution to Kakamega High School calls for some awareness of the Historical background of that institution within the wider contemporary context. The plan to establish a North Kavirondo (i.e. North Nyanza, which later became Kakamega, Bungoma and Busia districts) Local Native District School was first mooted on 20th May, 1925 during the district's inaugural meeting which was addressed by the Acting Governor, Sir Edward Denham. Then at its meeting of 19th August, 1927 the council considered the need to set up a Junior Secondary School, with an enrolment of 100 boys, as a joint venture with the Government. It was decided that the council would be responsible for the full expenses of African staff and boarding and half the cost of recurrent equipment and maintenance while the Government would be responsible for the cost of European staff and half the cost of recurrent equipment and maintenance. For that purpose, the council set aside 100 acres of land across River Isiukhu, adjacent to the late Chief Milimu's mill. The council further undertook to raise money, through taxation, towards construction costs, estimated at £10,000 of which £1,000 was already available. Finally, on 9th February, 1929, the council resolved, by a vote of 44 to 7, to set up the school. During its subsequent meeting on 5th and 6th August, 1930, the council finally resolved to levy two shillings per male adult, or hut, from 1st January, 1931 towards the project. A council resolution of 5th and 6th August, 1931 required that a school fee of sixty shillings per annum be paid by each boy, as was the case at Yala, Maseno and Kaimosi.

The establishment of Government African School, Kakamega was essentially motivated by the prevailing local educational and social conditions. At that time, elementary education was wholly in the hands of the various Missions (Catholics, Friends, C.M.S., Church of God and Pentecostals), who provided the first four or five years of education in their Day Schools. Furthermore, opportunities for boys' post-elementary education in present-day Western Province were controlled by the limited facilities provided by few Missions' Boarding Schools. And these were Yala (for Catholic pupils from present-day Western Province and Kisumu and Siaya Districts); Maseno (C.M.S. — the majority of pupils came from the present Siaya and Kisumu districts); Kima or Bunyore (Church of God); Nyang'ori (Pentecostals) and Kaimosi (Friends African Mission). Since there was growing demand for post-Day School education in the area, it became necessary to provide additional facilities by erecting Government African School, Kakamega. As the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner, C.M. Dobbs, observed on 8th December, 1927 in his letter to the Chief Native Commissioner, this was 'a matter on which the natives are very keen'. The local council's enthusiasm for the new type of School was further motivated partly by the desire to have an institution that it could directly control; partly by the need to establish a non-denominational school that could admit suitable boys from all the district's elementary schools; and partly by an apparent dissatisfaction with the type and quality of education provided by the Missions' elementary schools.

Construction work commenced in October, 1930, and was carried out by the Native Training Industrial Depot (N.I.T.D.) trainees, with the help of the school's labour force, under the supervision of D.A. Kerr, D. Anderson and J. Rae successively. The drawings for the school building were similar to those already approved by the then Public Works Department for the New Arab School at Mtwapa in Mombasa. Though the Local Native Council (L.N.C.) had set aside 100 acres for the school, the initial area of the school was only 25 acres. By 30th September, 1932 the entire construction scheme was completed and all the painting and fittings done. The whole complex comprised of the following: the main school building consisting of six classrooms, an office, a school hall and a store; a dining hall and kitchen; latrines; six staff houses; six dormitories; bathhouses; and carpentry and tailoring workshops. Earlier on 18th March, 1932, the L.N.C. had recommended the following names for four of the dormitories: Mumias, Hobleys, Murungas and Mulamas.

Such was the stage on which Harold Chapman was called upon by the colonial government to perform. In 1932 the school opened its doors to the first sixty pupils, drawn from all over the district. During the first decade Chapman was assisted by M/S J. Rae (Technical Instructor), Japheth W. Opi, J. Adala, Opemi (Pupils Teacher), A.M. Krema, M. Musau, Alfred Tsalwa, Nelson E. Obando, Nathan W. Ochami, Solomon Adagala and Thomas Ganira.

At the outset, Chapman systematically tried to mould the G.A.S. Kakamega into a leadership training ground through practical examples. A high standard of hygiene and cleanliness was a basic requirement at Kakamega. The school's close-mown lawns as well as its hockey pitch and the first XI football field were second to none in contemporary Western Kenya. Furthermore, boys at G.A.S. Kakamega were encouraged, through practical examples, to respect and aspire for the virtues of a blend of theoretical and practical skills. For example, in Agriculture classroom lessons were liberally complemented with practical work on the school farm, which was professionally managed. In the words of Mr. Chapman himself, "At least 3 or 4 periods per week . . . were spent by all the pupils" on Agricultural lessons. He further adds that the Agricultural Instructor 'always had at least two combined classes doing practical work in the gardens on Saturday mornings.'

Right at the outset, deliberate attempts were made to strike a balance between literary and technical education at the Government African School, Kakamega. During the early years the following non-technical subjects were taught: Arithmetic, Kiswahili, Geography, History, Nature Study and Hygiene. At first Kiswahili was the medium of instruction. Gradually, as the standard of entry improved, English was taught in the first year and later became the medium of instruction. Religious education was imparted during the morning assembly and Sunday service through scripture reading, hymns and prayers. Vocational training at the school consisted of Tailoring, Carpentry and Agriculture, which were also required for the Kenya African Preliminary Examination. Furthermore, until 1938 the school provided a five-year programme of technical education for indentured pupils in Tailoring and Carpentry. After three years at the school, the indentured pupils had the option of transferring to the Native Industrial Training Depot (N.I.T.D.) at Kabete for the remaining two years. At the end of their indenture, the pupils were provided with tools to set up their own income-generating activities in the district or elsewhere.

During Chapman's leadership at G.A.S. Kakamega, a firm tradition evolved whereby boys were taught and encouraged to do things for themselves. As early as May, 1933 boys were already being encouraged to build model latrines using their own hands. Furthermore, as part of a tree-planting campaign, boys were required to build seed-beds and to plant gum trees at home during school holidays. According to Chapman, the aim of the exercise was 'to reveal to what extent the training and teaching given at school was being carried across into the home life.' To achieve this subjective, Chapman visited the boys in their homes during school holidays. All this took place during the formative years of the school when the enrolment was still small.

G.A.S. Kakamega's pragmatic approach to education was, no doubt, inspired by Chapman's strong belief in, and respect for, the value of independent

thinking. Indeed, this was perhaps his most important contribution as a teacher and administrator. Being at once mild and flexible in his relation with colleagues and pupils alike, he encouraged the spirit of discussion and dialogue, and was himself a good listener. All this had the effect of imbuing pupils with an assertive attitude and self-confidence. In the strong belief that education 'must provide for the training of the emotions as well as the mind', Chapman established a tradition at Kakamega which emphasised thinking habits and discouraged the mere absorption of information. To that extent, inter-house competitions in athletics, hockey, football, volley-ball, music, physical education and debating were early introduced at the compound and played a significant role in shaping the character of the school and its pupils.

From all accounts, Chapman greatly contributed to the development of Kakamega High School. Yet, as a person, he was so modest that he could not readily acknowledge his personal contribution to that institution! He saw his role as having been merely that of a co-ordinator, somebody whose responsibility was essentially to represent the interests of the school in co-operation with others: 'Personal 'contributions' would have to depend on the agreement and co-operation of others and it is therefore not easy to assess them.' Such was his candid reply to my enquiries concerning his role at Kakamega High School.

Available sources indicate that Chapman was a dedicated and inspiring leader. In addition to his routine administrative and teaching duties, it was also his duty 'to order to good time the textbooks required for the various classes; to build up the staff library with books of reference . . . as well building up the pupils' library.' Under him, G.A.S. Kakamega developed from a Primary School to a Junior Secondary School (1946) and then into a Secondary School (1952). From 1944 the school was directly funded by the Department of Education. In that year additional physical facilities were established comprising a large new dining hall and kitchen, a three-roomed block for the Principal's Office, a pupils' Library and Reading Room and a Clerk's office.

By 1946 when Chapman returned to the school from leave and a brief stint at Butere (Chadwick College), work on a new block of buildings comprising two classrooms, a laboratory and a store was virtually complete. This was the building used by boys in the Junior Secondary and, later, School Certificate classes. Both classes were introduced in 1946 and 1952 respectively. Prior to 1953 when its first School Certificate class wrote their examinations, successful Kakamega High School pupils went for further education to the Alliance High School, Maseno, Yala and Kabaa (Mangu); others went for vocational training while some took up employment in the public and private sectors. From 1953 **however, successful candidates went direct to Makerere and, subsequently, to the Universities of Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam direct.** Thus by 1955 when Chapman retired, the school had developed into a full fledged secondary school, with all the

necessary facilities. Six years later it admitted boys into the first year of the Higher School Certificate programme.

It goes without saying that the school which was founded by Harold Chapman has made significant contributions to the development of Western Province, in particular, and Kenya, in general. In common with secondary schools of similar status over the years, Kakamega High School has produced valuable manpower that has greatly assisted in sustaining the private and public sectors in the entire nation. Indeed by 1955 Chapman was gratified to note that some of his former pupils were performing important roles in society as chiefs, members of the local councils, teachers, hospital assistants and agricultural instructors. He was further pleased to know that a number of the Primary Schools in present-day Western Province had ex-Kakamega pupils as their headteachers. Since 1955, Kakamega High School alumni have served in various capacities in practically all spheres of national life. Some of them have served with distinction in senior public positions in the republic while many others have excelled in the professions and sundry occupations. And here it is also worth noting that the school has produced some sportsmen of national and international stature such as J. Wekalao, Thomas Ashibende and Elijah Lidonde. No wonder, Kakamega High School's soccer team, the Green Commandos, won the national secondary schools soccer trophy for three consecutive years during 1979 – 1981, and kept it permanently!

For the purpose of the present contribution, it is neither desirable nor practical to provide a comprehensive list of Kakamega High School's alumni. Nevertheless, a few of them need to be listed for record purposes. Among others, they comprise the following: Professor Festo Mutere (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi); Professor Nimrod Bwibo (Principal, College of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Nairobi); Professor Richard Musangi (Vice-Chancellor, Egerton University); Professor Mathew Maleche (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Moi University); Mr. Moses Mukolwe (Ministry of Agriculture); Mr. William Wapakala (Agricultural Research Institute); Dr. Richard Wambwa; Dr. John Khaminwa; Mr. Ted Aswani (Ex-Solicitor-General); Dr. Hannington Oluoch; Mr. John Etemesi (Central Province Provincial Commissioner); Mr. Gershom Kitungulu (Kakamega businessman) Mr. Mathew Rapando (ex-Headmaster, Kakamega High School); Mr. J.B. Omondi (ex-Permanent Secretary); Mr. Stanley Muka (U.N.E.S.C.O.); Mr. Jesse Opembe (Assistant Minister); Mr. Alfred Machayo (ex-Ambassador); Professor Richard Odingo (ex-Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Nairobi); Mr. Silvano Ogesa (YUKEN and ex-K.N.T.C.); Mr. Wycliff Mutsune (Kenya Tourist Development Corporation); Mr. Apolo Oluoch (Kenya National Library Services); Mr. Samuel Tongoi (National Youth Service); the late O'Washika (ex-Member of Parliament); Mr. Japheth Shamala (ex-Permanent Secretary); Prof. Gershom Sande (University of Nairobi); Prof. James Shiroya (Kenyatta

University); Prof. George Eshiwani (Kenyatta University); Prof. Fredrick Okatcha (Kenyatta University); Mr. Benah Lutta (ex-High Court Judge); Prof. Peter Gufwoli (University of Nairobi); Prof. Washington Omondi (Kenyatta University); Dr. Arthur Kemoli; Mr. Joseph Lijembe (ex-Deputy-Secretary); Dr. Walter Otsyula (ex-University of Nairobi); Mr. A. Ekirapa (Nation Newspapers and ex-Director of Kenyanisation Bureau); Mr. Luke Musiga (ex-Director, N.S.S. Fund); Mr. Sheldon Muchilwa (Government Printer); Mr. Moody Awori (Assistant Minister); Mr. William Wamalwa (ex-Permanent Secretary); and Gideon S. Were.

The period up to 1968 following Chapman's departure was turbulent, characterised as it was by strikes, instability, expulsions and suspensions. So critical was the situation that the Kakamega County Council, the Kakamega branch of Kenya National Union of Teachers, the Abaluyia Makerere Students' Union, parents and prominent Abaluyia personalities (including some members of staff at Kakamega High School itself) expressed grave concern at what they saw as a serious threat to further education prospects for boys at Kakamega High School, in particular, and in Western Province generally. Chief among students' grievances were the following: the deterioration in academic standards; the tightening of discipline which verged on repression; the undue emphasis placed on extra-mural activities under the slogan of 'the dignity of labour'; the quality of food — a new diet consisting of crushed maize was introduced; the suspension of certain subjects, such as English Literature, for examination purposes; the apparent lack of dialogue; strained relations between staff and students, and among the staff in general; the insensitivity of the administration; poor teaching; and cleaning duties. Arising from this complex situation was a strong feeling all over Luyialand that prospects for further studies for boys from Western Province would diminish unless the situation was arrested promptly. During this era of intermittent crises which lasted for some twelve years, the school was headed by no fewer than four Headmasters, namely: P.O. Bryant (1956 – 1959); Ronald Purdy (1959 – 1960); J.H. Stewart (1961 – 1964); and V.A. Weissler (1965 – 1968).

With the appointment of Mr. Mathew Rapando as the first African Headmaster (himself a Kakamega High School old boy) in 1968, peace, stability and orderly progress were largely restored at the school. However, in 1972, 1973 and 1975 strikes and disturbances afflicted the school once again. Mr. Rapando was succeeded by Mr. E.G. Avedi (1976 – 1981). Under Mr. Avedi the school went through a period of sustained tranquility coupled with expansion and improvements in physical facilities, rising academic standards, and excellence in sports. By 1981 when Mr. Avedi left, Kakamega High School had emerged as the undisputed Kenya Secondary schools' soccer kings, having won the trophy for

three consecutive years, 1979 – 1981. Mr. John Kinaro is the current Headmaster of the school. Under him the school has maintained the stability and steady progress established during Mr. Avedi's tenure.

Today Kakamega High School is fifty-six years old. During its long and eventful history, the school has consolidated its role as the leading boys' secondary school in present-day Western Province. It has also maintained its position as one of the major boys' secondary schools in the republic. In common with similar institutions, Kakamega High School has made a significant contribution to development in all spheres of national life. It is for these reasons that tribute is paid in these columns to Harold Arthur Waterloo Chapman, the architect of Kakamega High School on the occasion of his demise.

*This article was specifically written in memory of H.A.W. Chapman, founder-Headmaster of Kakamega High School. The omission of notes is attributable to its obituary context.

About the Author

Gideon S. Were is a Professor of History and Director of the Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi, P.O. Box 30197, Nairobi, Kenya.

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