

## **COLLEGE HISTORY**

In 1928, the CMS and the Wesleyan Methodist Mission cooperated in founding one Teacher Training College for women in Ibadan called the United Missionary College. Its success led to the agreement to cooperate on another ventures, a secondary school for Boys in Lagos that would take account of the criticisms of existing secondary schools, thus, the founding of Igbobi College in 1932.

The aim was stated simply as “to give a well-balanced secondary education to boys in an environment adequate for the purpose”. The objective of the CMS and Methodist planners was to show that improved education could best be established under ecumenical Christian influence provided “an environment adequate for the purpose” could be located. This meant emphasizing residence for both pupils and teachers, and land spacious enough to cater for this, as well as providing fields for sport, craft, farm, etc. It was a novel concept for secondary education in Lagos. Hence the search for a 32-acre (130,000 m<sup>2</sup>) plot that used to be part of the kola plantations of the family of Madam Tinubu. It was from this that it derived its name, “Igbobi” College.

The founding fathers asked staff and students from the CMS Grammar School and Methodist Boys High School to volunteer and they carefully selected students for each class from Forms 2 to 6, and admitted a new set of students for Form 1. Thus the new school started with six classes in place. There were 55 boarders and 95 day students in all, averaging 25 in class, such that everyone, staff and students, knew everyone else. The selection was based on academic merit, discipline and good behavior.

The staff who joined the school in the first decade included N. A. Birthwistle; N. P. Morris, a history teacher who later became the Principal of Government College, Keffi; and Leslie Murby among the expatriates; and among the Nigerians Reverend (later Bishop) S. O. Odutola; Mr. S. Ogunlesi, the self-taught history graduate, and teacher of Latin and Mathematics, who later pioneered Adult Education in Western Nigeria; and Mr. Talabi Esubiyi (aka Pa Esubiyi), the famous Science Teacher and longest serving Vice-Principal who many alumni consider to be part of the ‘legend’ of the school.

### **Growth and trials, 1932–1956**

The first decade from February [1932] to December [1941] was a period of pioneering and steady growth. It was to be followed by half a decade of testing and trials. In this pioneering work, Igbobi was paving the way for other schools on the Lagos island which soon began to look round for spacious ground on the Mainland: CMS Grammar School, Baptist Academy, Queen’s College, Methodist Girl High School, St. Finbarr’s and others, though none was to find anything comparable to the Igbobi College campus.

The growth was steady but in the years of worldwide economic depression of the 1930s, the numbers in each of the six classes was kept to between 25 and 30. This made for a very select group. Initially government regulations required the boys to sit for the School Leaving Certificate in Form II (or Standard Six) and many also took the Junior Cambridge Examination in Form IV. These soon gave way to the School Certificate Examination or Senior Cambridge Examination in Form IV, which became the goal of every child, and determined the school curriculum in the upper classes. Here, the school maintained an acceptable standard except that the laboratories allowed for the teaching of Physics, Chemistry and Biology only to the level of General Science and not as individual subjects; and Elementary but not Additional Mathematics was offered.

The outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939, which soon turned into a global conflict, had its impact on the development at Igbobi. In 1942, the British Army looked round for a base in Lagos and decided that Igbobi College, along with the Higher College, must evacuate their compound as a contribution to the colonial Win-the-War effort. They wanted the compound without delay. While arrangements were

being made to put up prefabricated buildings on the site in Kudeti, Ibadan (where Yejide Grammar School is now located),

The war ended in 1945 and the school resumed back in Lagos in February 1946. For a further two years, Leslie Murby piloted the school. Times were changing. There were talks of constitutional changes and challenges to old colonial order. Leslie Murby himself was different kind of schoolmaster from the older missionary Angus type. Angus was a bachelor and did not get married till after his Igbobi days. Murby was a family man and, when he left Igbobi, he had a very successful career in publishing. The older generation of Nigeria teachers was also giving way to younger staff. Leslie Murby recruited D. O Fagunwa, the famous author to teach Yoruba; C. O. D. Ekwensi, a pharmacist by profession and novelist by choice, to teach English Language; Dick W. Emuchay who had completed 6 years of medical training when the pernicious higher College system rejected him, came to teach Biology, before he went abroad to complete Medical training and became the Medical Director of the famous Cottage Hospital outside Aba; and other = people like S. O. Ighodaro, later a lawyer, politician, High Court judge and now the Iyase of Benin, and F.O. Fagbemi, who died prematurely, both fresh from Fourah Bay College.

### **The Golden Age, 1948–1957**

The generations who studied under the principalship of Reginald Parker in the decade 1948-57 like to refer to it as the Golden Age of Igbobi. They were certainly years of maturity and new initiatives when the dreams of the founding fathers and several tendencies of earlier years came to fruition. Both Angus and Murby emphasized the Christian traditions of the school, moral training and high quality of teaching and scholarly work, but they were not imposing any particular model on the school. There was the emphasis on sports, solidarity and competition, with the value of playing the game outweighing those of winning the game. Boater hats with Igbobi College colors of blue and gold were imported, and blazers were introduced. Reginald Parker was an Anglican clergyman, a life bachelor and professional schoolmaster who more consciously sought to evolve a model of the English public school adapted to the Nigerian environment. The post-World War II economic boom, decolonization, and the clamor for the best in British education provided the right setting for this work.

Parker broadened the school curriculum so that the boys had more choice at School Certificate. He built new laboratories so that Physics, Chemistry and Biology as well as Additional Mathematics were offered as separate subjects in the School Certificate. It was during his time that the School Certificate began to be taken in Form V instead of Form VI. The campus also took on a new look. The conversion of buildings left by the Army into boarding houses... Aggrey, Freeman, Oluwole and Townsend... was completed. The completion of the College Chapel permitted the introduction of new rituals such as the West entrance, with the Principal either in cassocks or in academic dress. He instituted Commemoration Day, the forerunner of the present Foundation Day Service. The first Commemoration Day Service was held in the Anglican Cathedral, Marina, in 1950 when Professor James Welch of the University College Ibadan preached the sermon.

### **Expansion, 1958–1976**

Mr. S. A. Babalola a graduate of Cambridge University, an old boy and first Nigerian Principal, was appointed in 1958 to succeed Reginald Parker. He had set the unbeatable record in the School Certificate of an alpha in each of the maximum 9 subjects he took in 1943. He had been asked to stay on as a teacher before going to Cambridge on scholarship. It was appropriate that he should lead the school into the era of Nigerian independence until he resigned in 1961, later becoming a distinguished professor of Yoruba and National Merit Award Winner.

The Sixth Form was introduced in 1960, first in the Arts, then Science. Without waiting for external pressure, the school admitted a second arm of Class I in 1961. In 1962, the government decreed that

the policy of providing boarding facilities for all should be discarded and that a minimum of one third should be day students thus began the race of number. In December 1962, there were 284 students in the school, two arms of Form I & II, and one arm in the Form III to V.

Babalola continued the tradition-building era of Igbobi. Parker began a period of expansion and began to mobilize old students as a force in the development of the school. The changes that were portended by national independence began to manifest themselves under the principalship of Mr. J. O. Olatunbosun who took office in 1963 after the awkward one-year stopgap under the Reverend S. Matabese, a South African.

Independence ended the arrangements under which the colonial government cooperated with voluntary agencies in the development of education through the grants-in-aid system. Under that scheme, Igbobi College received grants which covered teachers' salaries, some grants for capital development and equipment. The school was however autonomous under the effective management of the Board of Governors on which the CMS, the Methodist Mission, and the Ministry of Education were represented. By 1963, the new nationalist government had won the battle to take over control of schools so that they could prosecute their ambitious policies of Universal Primary Education, and making provision for the products of UPE at secondary level. Thus, independence portended the intrusion of politics into the administration of schools and an irresistible pressure for expansion even at the risk of devaluating existing standards.

At Independence, Igbobi was under the Western Region. In 1965, it passed into Federal Government control. In 1967 when Lagos State was created, Igbobi lost the battle to remain under Federal control and it fell under the Lagos State Government. By 1976 when Olatunbosun retired, there were over 1,000 students, five arms in Forms I to V, and two each in the Lower and Upper Sixth Forms. The school had lost its autonomy. The Board of Governors had become virtually redundant in the administration of the school. The rules and regulations of the Ministry had eroded the authority of the Principal even in the maintenance of discipline. The Parents/Teachers' Association and the Old Boys' Association had constantly mobilized to come to the aid of the school and to constitute a lobby to discourage the worst excesses of government policies and regulations.

### **Desecration, 1976–2006**

With little planning, the Federal Military Government at the height of the oil boom, took control of elementary education and launched a Universal Primary Education throughout the country in 1976. In Lagos, this meant an avalanche of pupils with no schools, or even land on which to build schools. All kinds of gimmicks were resorted to, including three shifts, each of 4 hours a day in many schools. When the civilian regime took over in 1979, the Unity Party of Nigeria that won the election in Lagos had the policy of free secondary education. A school like Igbobi College, maintaining such high standards and school traditions appeared targeted for desecration.

First, the government decreed that no school was to be allowed to retain boarders. The school's Board of Governors, PTA and Old Students' Associations petitioned to maintain the Boarding Houses at no cost to the government and to build classroom blocks equal in space to the Boarding Houses which the government wished to convert into extra classrooms. But the government was adamant. The boarders were disbanded. The government took over the boarding houses at Igbobi and converted them into offices for the Ministry of Education.

Worse still, the government considered the playing fields and well-trimmed, well-kept lawns as elitist and unnecessary luxuries in the era of mass education. Without even bothering to lay them out properly, they proceeded to erect three new secondary schools and one primary school within the campus of Igbobi College. Officially, Igbobi College became Igbobi College I, and the others Igbobi College II, III, IV. The population of Igbobi College I itself rose rapidly to over 1,500, including girls

drafted from some illegal schools that the government had closed down. There was no longer any attempt to carefully select, or to provide accommodation for staff, or to encourage continuity, let alone commitment, among the staff.

Many old boys became despondent and the ₦5 Million Endowment Fund launched in 1979 yielded only ₦75,000. It required years of lobbying to allow what remained of Igbobi College to be fenced round. It was a matter for great rejoicing when the new mushroom schools on the campus ceased to be called Igbobi College and became Angus Memorial School, Igbobi High School, etc.

### **Ongoing Developments, 2006 – Present (2015)**

The general consensus was that some of the new schools developed did not necessarily come up to the historic standards of Igbobi College and other older institutions. And despite older buildings beginning to fall apart on campus, life carries on for pupils at Igbobi College. Recently however various branches of ICOBA, the Alumni, in Nigeria, Europe and the USA continue to contribute their quota in supporting the ongoing developmental needs of the school through benevolent efforts and charitable donations.