
Bannerman, James

(1790–1858),

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a prominent trader in nineteenth-century Ghana, was born in 1790. His mother was a Ga woman from Accra who had family ties with the Alata chief in the neighboring town of Osu and the Asere chief of Kinka. His father was Colonel Henry Bannerman, a Scottish officer and a trader in the Royal Africa Company stationed at the British fort of Cape Coast. Bannerman's father's connections in the British government and his mother's connections in southern Ghana helped prepare the way for his rise as a businessman. Bannerman's ambitions were facilitated by the changing nature of trade between European nations and West Africa. The British government's efforts to close the international slave trade posed some challenges for coastal communities on the Ghanaian coast, although the stabilization of the Asante kingdom's borders had already led to a decline of slave exports from the region by the early nineteenth century. By the 1850s, the use of steamships and growing demand for palm oil and cash crops in Europe had led to expanded trade opportunities. Bannerman successfully competed with British companies before and after the coming of the steamer to Ghana, and he became a very prosperous slave owner.

British missionaries and the small British colonial administration based at Cape Coast had mixed feelings about Bannerman. On the one hand, his fluent command of English and his willingness to support British interests made him a valuable ally. He met his wife through the British government's war with the Asante kingdom. In 1826, Bannerman married Yaa Hom, a princess belonging to the royal family of the powerful Asante kingdom. Yaa Hom was a daughter of the Asante king Osei Bonsu, who was captured at the battle of Katamanso in 1826 by British troops. However, Bannerman felt that efforts to abolish slavery in Cape Coast by colonial officials like Governor Charles Macarthy in 1826 interfered with his rights as a property owner. Bannerman agreed to partially free his slaves and henceforth treated them as indentured servants. Later, Bannerman felt that Macarthy had exaggerated his authority to abolish slavery and that he had been tricked. In 1841, Bannerman wrote the British parliament that any effort to force people to give up their slaves would lead to an exodus of Africans out of British-controlled territory.

Despite the reservations on both sides, Bannerman eventually entered the colonial administration. The Colonial Office named him a justice of the peace at Cape Coast in 1842. He was named lieutenant governor of the Gold Coast in 1850, and he was an unofficial member of the Gold Coast Legislative Council from 1850 to 1856. During Bannerman's tenure as lieutenant governor, he defended Afro-English missionary Thomas Birch Freeman when he was attacked by priests of the southern Ghanaian deity Naanam Mpow in 1850. Bannerman arrested and jailed the priests. Although he was passed over in his bid to become governor, he continued to be an active voice of the coastal trading elite. His son Charles set up the *Accra Herald* newspaper in 1857, most likely with some financial support from his father. He died in 1858, and his family remained extremely prominent in Accra for the next century.

[See also Freeman, Thomas Birch.]

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See also

Freeman, Thomas Birch <<https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-48761>>