Handley Hooper can be glimpsed in general accounts of Kikuyu Kenya in the 1920’s largely by virtue of his typewriter. As the CMS missionary at Kahuhia until 1926 he was closely associated with the local athomi politicians responsible for the emergence of the Kikuyu Central Association, and it was on his typewriter that the first KCA document was produced, a petition to the 1924 Ormsby-Gore Parliamentary Commission on the future development of East Africa.

The typewriter incident is intriguing. It signals a degree of co-operation between the missionary and an increasingly politicised athomi group, and raises questions about the ways in which an emergent associational and literate politics drew on missionary resources. Specifically, it invites exploration of the wider context of attitudes and relationships at Kahuhia. The very place in which athomi political activity was first renewed after the collapse of Harry Thuku’s East African Association in 1922, was also the home of the missionary widely known for his sympathy towards native politics and for the quality of his friendships with the athomi there.

Handley Hooper was part of an extraordinary three-generation dynasty of CMS missionaries at Kahuhia. His father Douglas Hooper was converted as an undergraduate by the Moody-Sankey revivals at Cambridge in 1882. As a CMS missionary of independent means from 1885 to his death in 1917, Douglas Hooper earned a reputation as a strong-minded and self-disciplined individualist, with a zeal for simple evangelism unfettered by wider concerns. Handley was born on the Kenyan coast in 1891, but after his mother’s death in 1893 he was sent to England, and did not return to Kenya until 1916 when as a newly ordained and married man he joined his father, now working
at Kahuhia in the Kikuyu reserve. While Handley was serving in German East Africa in 1917 and 1918 with the Kikuyu Mission Volunteers, his father died, and with his wife Cicely he inherited the work at Kahuhia. His early years in Kenya, especially his experience of wartime service and friendship with the Kikuyu, and conflicts with his father, led him to adopt a strikingly different tone to the disciplinarian conservatism of Douglas Hooper. Handley revelled in the prospect of intimacy with Kikuyu friends, showing himself reluctant to assert missionary authority, and he was concerned that second-generation missionary work in Kikuyuland should embrace broader needs than pure evangelism alone. Cicely too was an energetic and articulate advocate of change in CMS work. Daughter of a Cheltenham family prominent in local politics she was appalled by the oppressive male dominance which she discerned in both the CMS and in Kikuyu society, and her activism and outspokenness frequently out-stripped her husband’s more conciliatory style. After ten years in Africa, Handley and Cicely Hooper returned to England in 1926, where Handley was CMS Africa Secretary until 1949. Their son Cyril, born in Kenya in 1916, returned to Kikuyuland with the CMS in 1942, working as a teacher at Kahuhia and as Supervisor of Schools in Murang’a during the emergency.

Hooper is regularly credited with fostering at Kahuhia a fusion between church growth, educational provision, and political activism in the years following the first world war. War brought instability to Kenya, and the immediate post-war years were turbulent in Kikuyuland. Native grievances were fuelled by the introduction of the *kipande* passbook for Africans, the forced labour circular, and reductions in native wages, and by the time of the Hoopers’ return from furlough in January 1922, Kikuyu politics was in the turmoil of the Harry Thuku up-rising. Returning, Hooper felt that ‘the future of mission work in this district is trembling in the balance,’ and set about a vigorous engagement with African aspirations at Kahuhia. Within a year Kahuhia Normal School and Technical School were opened, with the aim of providing a model of excellence for mission education to meet the new demands from the native community, and a girls’ boarding school was begun alongside, supported by Cicely’s independent fund-raising activities. In the same year a degree of self-government was given to the Native Church Council, and in his annual letter Hooper demonstrated his sympathy with Kikuyu political aspirations. Hooper disapproved of Thuku’s politics, but extraordinarily among the missionaries he was prepared to welcome him to Kahuhia and talked with him there in 1922. In the wake of Thuku’s arrest and the crushing of his East Africa Association, Hooper