

ONE WORLD LINK ANNUAL REPORT FOR AGM Dec. 19th 2007.

This last year has been quite memorable and very busy. It was the 26th year of the link with Bo and we spent the last 12 months celebrating our 25th Anniversary.

There was reason behind the madness of taking on so much. Some of us had been with the link since it started and we were anxious that it might survive for another 2 or 3 decades and this meant we had to attract new people to take our link forward. Bo committee are trying to do the same.

So our strategy having obtained Awards for All funding was to organise 4 anniversary events - picture exhibition, archive project, reaching secondary schools (through debating competition) and a big African Event - all described below.

Were we successful? I would say very much so having reached many new people in schools and the local councils and among younger communities. We also have a brilliant web site and a burgeoning archive.

In addition to the Anniversary, we had visitors from Bo and visits to Bo. It was a pleasure for all of us to have another visit from Johannes Mallah, Chair of Bo OWL. He played an important role in working with us to define a future vision for OWL. We also continued to support Bo OWL's efforts to get the OWL Community Centre completed... and we all succeeded. So much so that I and 4 local council officers were the first lucky visitors to experience the fabulous Bo hospitality and we attended the opening ceremony for the centre.

The school links have progressed slowly with more feedback from the Bo end. The Local Authority sub group succeeded in investigating a 3 year plan of cooperation with Bo City Council (see separate report). The women have a new leader (Val Davis) at this end of the link and we hope to get a youth group together to join forces with the new youth group in Bo. The latest effort to widen our possibilities has been a request from Kiss FM (the local radio in Bo) to link with the Leamington Courier and a letter has been passed from them to Martin Lawson, the editor, with a suggestion that he consider visiting Bo. (He did not say no!)

The future looks promising with more of the same although more focussed and strategic. Another visit is planned for February when Judith Ellis will continue the Archive programme by recording memories of Bo from old men and women who remember its earliest days before and after independence. Some of our newer members will also go out to work with Johannes and his committee on a business plan for the Community Centre. John Myers also hopes to go to catch up with all his friends in Bo.

Well done everyone who has contributed to OWL's success this year. It has been very hard work keeping up with all the initiatives but a great joy and privilege to be involved.

Below are the sub group reports.

Membership - Richard Edwards

"We currently have 117 active members (136 including joint members). We have lost 4 members since the last AGM due to cancellation and one death, but have had 7 new members join. For regular membership income we receive £542.50 per year in cheque payments and £2,489 in standing order payments per year (£3,031.50 in total)"; this excludes what we receive in donations. I would like to thank all members for their continuing support and generosity.

The aim for the coming year is to seek new members, to provide membership support

to existing members, and to ensure a regular and important source of income for OWL through timely membership renewal reminders."

Anniversary events

Picture Exhibition – Kip Warr.

"As one of the activities to celebrate the 25th anniversary year of the link, the Warwick committee decided to run a picture exhibition in which the images would be provided by the public in both districts. Awards for All kindly provided lottery funds for the project and we received helpful advice from the Arts Development Officer at Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum, from Hybrid Arts and from the Resident Photographer at Spencer Yard. There were four themes for pictures: A day in my/our life, Home and family, Friendship and Dreams and Aspirations.

Some three hundred images, many of them children's drawings, were collected and over 200 were put on the OWL website. Many of them were printed as postcards and taken to Bo for display; in return a school in Bo sent pictures back to Warwick. A selection of the pictures were enlarged to A3 size and mounted to form an exhibition. They were first displayed at our Archive Event in June, then in the Leamington Peace Festival and at schools and in the new Bo Community Centre. They are still available for display at schools and other locations and events and we encourage OWL members and other organisations to apply to use them.

Website

During the past year we have completely revamped and enlarged the website, partly as a by-product of the anniversary celebrations. It now contains information about our activities and includes a display of pictures from the Picture Exhibition. The website now contains an extensive online archive of about 130 documents such as personal letters describing conditions during the civil war and reports from visitors to Bo and to Warwick. There is a search box on the home page that searches the entire archive and we encourage anyone with an interest in Bo or Sierra Leone to use this as a resource.

The Schools Sub-Group have prepared Education pages for the website, which include their teaching resources, so that schools will be able to access and download them for their own use. These should go 'live' by the year end."

Archive project – Myf Hodkin

"For more years than I like to admit, there has been a large cardboard box under my stairs labelled "Everything in this box belongs to One World Link". I acquired it when I was Chairperson of OWL and had glanced through the contents, realising that it contained some interesting items. Having become involved in the 25th anniversary archive project, I decided to take a closer look. It was decided that we should put together a Time Line of OWL's history and so I dived into the box and was rewarded with a discovery of many treasures.

There were first hand accounts of visits to and from Bo; past minutes and newsletters; academic papers on Sierra Leone, and magazine articles; press cuttings, photos and correspondence relating to funding, support projects, shipping; and not least a bundle of air letters which David Ngombu had managed to get to me throughout most of the Civil War years.

We held a special Archive Event in Spencer Yard on 9th June when we put some of the archive on display, together with the timeline, the website and video footage from Bo. This, too, was funded by Awards for All. We gathered some valuable additions to the archive and gained additional publicity for the link.

Quite obviously, much of the material was of historic value. My first task was to create some kind of order by grouping the items in files – visits – minutes – etc. I then started on the Time Line filling in major events for each year under appropriate headings. This involved reading most of the material, a long but fascinating job.

It became obvious that a permanent accessible record was needed and this would require IT skills which were nobly made available to us by Kip Warr. More recently, Nan Eells came to the rescue and between them they have done a magnificent job making the material available to a wide audience through the web site.

The box is still under my stairs, and in fact is filling up with even more gems passed on from OWL members during the last year."

BIG AFRICA NIGHT- Chris King and John Myers

The evening of Nov 10th in the town hall was truly memorable and a fitting culmination to our 25th anniversary year. Only a week before the event John Myers and I were concerned that too few tickets had been sold, but, as if by magic, in the last few days they began to fly out the door and we were asking our caterers to up the numbers! Further to confound the norm, the three bands all turned up complete and on time, and showed admiral patience and good humour dodging each other and squeezing themselves onto the tight stage. They made exciting and happy music. The sell out audience was a wonderful mix of ages and it was lovely to see so many friends from Coventry SLAWAD and Martin from BODDA. During a gap in the music Johannes, over with us as Chair of BO OWL, spoke warmly about twenty five years of the link, and there were words too from the Mayor of Leamington and Jane, our chair. The food tasted great and was plentiful, the atmosphere as celebratory as we could have wished for, with many dancing for as long as the bands kept on playing.

Secondary schools & road show - Alan Moss

Over the year we have been in contact with 4 secondary schools in the patch with varying success at raising interest in having a visit from us or from one of our contacts.

Kenilworth school is now officially twinned with Bo Government School through the British Council "Dreams and Teams" scheme. Several meetings were held with contacts at the school which has resulted in OWL providing a short input during their Africa week evening show and Fr Combey speaking to a class as part of their studies. The school made a very generous donation to us from the proceeds of their Africa week. 3 Teachers from the school visited Bo in early July and signed a twinning agreement with Bo Government school and also discussed the logistics for taking a party of students to Bo in 2008. Our links with Kenilworth continue to grow and 2 members of the staff are playing an increasing role within our group.

We have also been active during the year at Aylesford School. OWL was invited to have an input to their annual International Day, we took a 6th form assembly, and Fr Combey took one of the citizenship classes. A group from the school also produced some post cards for our exhibition. The cards have been taken to Bo and we have recently received replies from Milton School Bo.

North Leamington School were planning on a visit to their linked school – Ahmadiyya in 2008 but due to other priorities have had to withdraw from this visit. We will continue to look at strengthening our links with North Leamington School over the coming year.

We are hopeful that during 2008 we can revive our links with Trinity school.

As part of the Awards for All grant we purchased a projector and speakers that can be used in schools to raise awareness of the issues in Sierra Leone. Work has started on producing several multi media presentations and we hope to complete these during 2008 and use them in all of the above schools.

Primary Schools- Brian Austin

"There are now nominally 10 links between Primary Schools, including the most recent between Kingsway Community School and Zenith International Academy, but activity levels vary considerable from school to school and from term to term.

The Primary Teachers' Group now meet once each term with teachers usually from about 5 of the linked schools attending, when they share on what has been happening and learn from each other's experiences.

The majority of schools benefited from visits of Mary Bakaar and Johannes Mallah, the importance of which cannot be overestimated. We owe both Mary and Johannes a great debt of gratitude for their valuable inputs.

Schools contributed to the Picture Exhibition and have also had them on display.

The ex-teachers Planning Group working on teaching materials have produced an extensive lesson-plan on crops, food and cooking. All the resources that they have produced so far have been issued to schools on CD-ROM, but will soon be available for download from the website.

Communication continues to be the main problem in maintaining links and some schools appear to be inactive without representation at the Primary Teachers' Group or hosting our Bo visitors. In an attempt to address this issue we have produced and promoted a set of 'minimum standards', but whether or not a link is successful depends on the linked schools themselves and there are deficiencies at both ends.

For the future, we are encouraging schools to look at British Council funding for exchange visits at least a year in advance."

Shipping/Practical Assistance – Alan Moss

"A 20 foot container with some 52 computers, 160 sewing machines, 2 large boxes of crutches and 90 boxes of school books along with many other items was packed and despatched on 23rd December last year. This was all made possible by a great team effort by many members particularly on the day when we had 2 hours to get it all into the container. We thought that by buying the container and sending it all the way to Bo rather than take the risk of unpacking in Freetown would make life easy for our friends. Unfortunately there were considerable difficulties in getting the container cleared through customs and shipped from Freetown to Bo. The container therefore did not arrive until late January and the whole process caused major problems for several members of the Bo OWL group.

Recently we have shipped a few small items as part of a container being sent to Bo by our friends in BODDA.

The difficulties in organising and managing such shipments along with the overall cost are creating the need for us to review how we meet the needs of our friends in Bo. In 2008 it is hoped that our strategy regarding practical support can be fully discussed and implemented."

I hope OWL will continue to grow from strength to strength. It is really beginning to make an impact in Bo and Warwick Districts. There are problems with accessing Visas for the UK and communications, although much improved on the early days, do limit some of the activities which could take place especially between schools.

I wish the new committee and the up and coming members of Bo OWL the best of luck and hope they will continue to realise the joys and satisfaction which come with this magical link.

Jane Knight
Outgoing Chair.