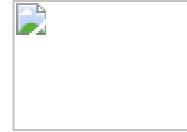


OWL NEWSLETTER - March 2003

SHIPMENT TO BO - A SUCCESS STORY

PRESS RELEASE 16th December 2002



For the past 18 months the Warwick District One World Link Committee has been collecting donated goods to fill a container to send to their friends at the other end of this community friendship link in Bo Sierra Leone.

Many people, groups, and firms have been generous. The final push has now arrived. Tomorrow morning a team of volunteers will work flat out to load the container in a matter of three hours so that it can then be dispatched on its long journey to Sierra Leone. It is scheduled to reach the port of the capital city Freetown on 15th January, and will then face a 140-mile journey over a bumpy road inland to Bo.

The goods have been stored in the Old Dole Office Building in Spencer's Yard Leamington. They include school exercise and text books, reading books, pens and paper, hand sewing machines, manual typewriters, and clothing. A large part of the consignment will be taken up with second hand computers, which have been over-hauled by a team of student volunteers from University of Warwick. A number of surplus computers have been donated by Warwick District Council for use by Bo Town Council. Most of the other goods will be distributed by Bo One World Link Committee to local schools and community groups as they are best placed to judge where the need is greatest and where the goods will be put to good use.

The container itself is also a gift to Bo; and will be used as a storeroom there.

John Myers, Secretary of One World Link, has just returned from a two-week visit to Bo where he was received with great warmth and hospitality. He said, "I have seen for myself how much the kind of things we are sending are indeed needed. We have seen images on TV of burnt out buildings and people with amputated limbs as a result of the civil war in Sierra Leone; but I also saw how much the schools, the hospital, the roads, and every service we take for granted has been run down by the effects of the war. It is very important that these things are made better if further unrest is to be avoided with all its tragic consequences. The people of Bo are generous hearted, good humoured, and capable; and deserve all the help we can give them to stand again on their own two feet. The Bo OWL Committee have begun to build a Resource Centre for use by the whole community; and a lot of the goods will be housed there e.g. in an Information technology Centre, so they can be shared by as many as possible. The electricity supply is intermittent and I experienced many "blackouts"; one thing they still need for the computers is equipment such as UPS to protect them from power failure."

Newsletter produced for OWL by Brian Austin, 31 The Greswoldes, Radford Semele, Leamington Spa CV31 1TP

PRESS RELEASE 5th February 2003

Members of Warwick District One World Link were delighted to learn today that the container of donated goods sent to our link partners in Bo Sierra Leone has arrived safely, and that all the goods are intact.

The consignment included 91 re-cycled computers. Some were a gift from Warwick District Council to Bo Town Council. Other computers will go to schools.

A significant number of computers are destined for the Community Centre that the members of Bo One World Link are building. They will form an Information Technology Centre available to the whole community. This will develop into an internet café as soon as the internet arrives in Bo.

John Myers, our Secretary has recently returned from a visit to Bo, in order to review and develop the various activities of the Link - not least progress on the Community Centre.

He has told us that " I was very proud to be one of the guests of honour at the ground-breaking ceremony for the Centre, I laid the first spade of concrete in the foundations, and the local Paramount Chief poured a libation in honour of his ancestors who used to own the land. This was followed by a performance of traditional drumming and dancing. I got so carried away with the excitement of it all that I joined in with the dancing much to the delight and amusement of the crowd. It is truly heart warming to have witnessed the start of something constructive and good, after the cruelty and destruction of the civil war"





We owe a debt of gratitude to **Janet Alty**, (with more than a little help from her friends, of whom Andrew Watts and Lee Hales deserve a special mention) for co-ordinating the collection, storage, refurbishment and despatch of this consignment, involving a considerable amount of work (and house room) over a very long period of time - it has taken her the best part of 2 years to get this completed! **Thanks Janet!** Thanks, too, to **Next Stop** and **The Big Cup** for help on the day with electricity and hot drinks.

John Myers : My visit to Bo

It is difficult to describe in a few words the rich, varied, and packed experience in what was my first time in Africa. I was looked after well by our friends from the moment of arrival at the heliport to final departure at the ferry port. Consequently, my anxiety was low, I had no mishaps and I enjoyed myself throughout.

Minor ordeals were the steamy heat in Freetown, struggling and failing to erect a mosquito net by torchlight, and the bone shaking road from Masiaka (also known as Mile 47) to Bo.

Surprises were the tastiness of the food, the noise, electrical goods in the shops. There were so many street sellers and stallholders I wondered how they make a living.

Lasting memories include travelling the bumpy dirt track streets on the back of Joe's motor bike (I must send him a pair of goggles), warm evenings on the veranda, dancing to the drums, seas of children's faces before me in schools, a football match, and a myriad more.

But, this was a working visit. So what came out of it? Lots of small things rather than anything major, all helping to keep the chains of the link together and to form new ones.

I came away convinced that exchange visits are crucial to the link. I met so many people, I could not remember names or even recognise them on a second meeting; but the fact that I did it is very important. I know how much impact the visitors from Bo made when they came here. So, we must maximise the opportunities for these to take place. We will only be able to raise so much money to fund this ourselves however generous our members and supporters are. We need to learn of as many sources of funding as we can.

- I deposited the first shovel-full of concrete in the foundations of the OWL Community Centre, and the walls are now going up.

- I helped start links between two pairs of schools

- I helped cement the new link between Leamington and Bo Rotary clubs

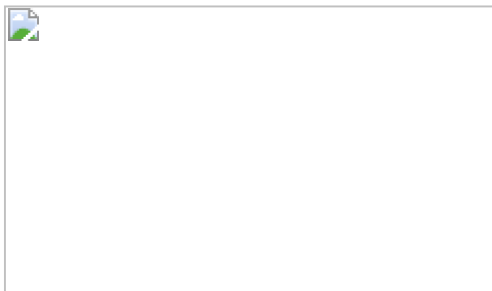
- I was guest of honour at the Kayoma Women's development Association

- I brought back a letter from the Chair of Bo Red Cross for the Red Cross here.

- I found a good place to stay when family hospitality is not appropriate

- In Freetown I met two Sierra Leone Government Ministers and the Directors of the British Council and the Department for International Development

- I took photos and video to augment our display materials



John (second from left) with staff of UBC School

All the rest is in reports I have written under the headings of Community centre, School Links, Civic Link, Community Links, and Koloseum. These are available on request. *(contact details below)
I am very glad I had the opportunity to make this visit, and I hope I have made a positive contribution to our cause.

The most difficult thing was to evaluate how things are in Sierra Leone. I was given a good time.

People I met had food to eat, and I ate very well. There is cheerfulness about. If you are prepared to put up with constant electricity cuts and well water, on the face of it life is not too bad, even better than here.

Equally, it would be very easy to discover the bad things, the migration into the towns and neglect of villages and land, the growing problem of urban destitution, the collapsed infrastructure, only one state provided dentist for the whole of Southern province.

I went to a comparatively less-poor part; I am sure that the expert evaluations of Sierra Leone's dire plight are true.

Sierra Leone is a delightful place; but it is very vulnerable. The people are delightful, yet corruption, exploitation and malevolence exist. It could be such a good place if they set their minds to it, and the rest of the world made it possible.-----* John Myers

***Where flies the owl across the sea
From one meaning to another?
Why flies the owl with wings drumming
To unseen messages from the forest?
How flies the owl through currents of contradiction?
With feathers of friendship, eyes of wisdom
And knowledge that no other being may find
Until the night is at rest and the new day yawns
Shakes off its dreams and takes a walk forwards
Guided by memories that came when no-one was looking***

Bo, Sierra Leone December 2002.
Written by torchlight late at night
following a conversation about the
different meaning of owl in our two
cultures
(UK: wisdom - SL: eeriness)

Report from Bruce Knight on his trip to Sierra Leone (16/12/2002 - 6/1/2003)

I had the idea of a "singing" study trip to Bo way back in January 2002. The community choir, Songlines, that I direct, was going from strength to strength, and it had been a long time since I'd been abroad. Sierra Leone was a natural choice - I had recently become aware of the Leamington - Bo link, and I had always had a vague interest in the country because my mother was born in Freetown back in the late 40s. John Myers and Janet Alty were very positive and encouraging from the start, and gradually a plan started to form. I would travel to Bo and learn local Mende songs, which I would later teach to Songlines for a celebratory / awareness-raising concert.

The following months were spent raising funds, and making preparations and contacts. The seed of an idea began (thanks to regular encouraging meetings with John) to sprout into something tangible and positive. Before I knew it, December was looming and I had my flight ticket in my hand. John's visit to Bo in November had the effect of priming everyone before my arrival, so when I eventually came into town there was a lot of interest and anticipation surrounding my visit.

I was, of course, formally welcomed by the Bo OWL committee, but it was not long before events became far more informal. I had been escorted from Freetown by Alfred Kobbah, the musically talented son of Joe Kobbah. I spent a good part of my time in Bo singing with Alfred and Albert Trye, a choir leader from the Bo Methodist Church. Whilst in Bo, I was hosted by Joe and Saffi, ex-OWL chair Mohammed Lapiere, and by Teresa and Josaya Bangali. Many of my happiest moments were spent sitting out in Teresa's yard, singing English and Mende songs with Teresa, her daughter Manjia, and Teresa's best friend Cathryn. Teresa and Cathryn took me under their wing from the start and made sure I was well fed, looked-after, and supplied with enough Star beer.

It was not long that I discovered that most of the singing in Bo takes place in church. I probably spent more time in church during those 2.5 weeks than I have in my entire life! Teresa, Cathryn, Alfred, Joe, Albert, and later Father Peter Konteh introduced me to several different choirs and performance groups, and I spent plenty of time making recordings, learning songs and brushing up on my Mende pronunciation.

My experiences were diverse to say the least. I felt like a minor celebrity in Bo, and at times the hospitality could become exhausting. As well as learning songs, I had opportunities to teach. I taught each of the choirs a song or two from the Songlines repertoire, and spent New Years Day as the "special guest UK artiste" at Father Konteh's orphanage-picnic. Teaching 300 children the okey-cokey is no mean feat! My most extreme and unforgettable experience was at Bo prison on Christmas morning. I was let in the prison as a guest, where I was delighted to see 100 plus prisoners dancing and singing a Mende hymn. They taught this to me, and I reciprocated with South Africa's rousing "Freedom is Coming". It's rare I've seen men sing with such gusto and feeling!

All in all, the trip was an enriching and eye-opening experience. I was constantly amazed by everyone's kindness and generosity. I've recently started to go through my recordings, and start arranging appropriate songs to teach Songlines. The plan is to share these songs with a wider audience as part of a fund-raising concert on 16th July. So please keep this date free for now, and I'll keep OWL members posted. If you would like to see Songlines in action before this, you may want to come to their Warwick concert on Saturday March 22nd. They'll be singing all manner of worldwide harmony songs, and this year are delighted to be joined by Coventry's Worldsong community choir. Tickets cost £5 and are available from the Bridge House (01926 776438). Last year's gig sold out so

you might need to book early.

AN APPEAL TO ALL OUR MEMBERS

We are now facing a challenging time. The civil war is over; Sierra Leone is on the long haul back to stability and economic viability. Our Link which survived the Civil War intact but in a tenuous state now needs to be built up; both for the reasons of international friendship and, because of that existing friendship so that we can help Bo OWL to play its part in that endeavour.

Therefore we want to re-establish school links and health links. On top of that we would like to extend the links into other parts of the community. If you have a place of work, or an organisation or group

the links into other parts of the community. If you have a place of work, or an organisation or group you belong to which might be able to link with a counterpart in Bo, please now give that a whirl. If you would like advice help or support to do it please get in touch. If you know of someone willing to enter into an individual personal or professional penfriendship then please let [Brian know](#) - again support and advice available.

If you have any talents or interests that could be useful in terms of reaching out into our community, please let us know.

We also need money to continue to fund exchange visits. All we ask is just a £10 donation each year to become a 'member'.

We need lots of money to support Bo OWL to build their community centre; the foundations have now been dug!

If you have any ideas of grant giving bodies or of other means for fundraising please let us know. More information about all this will come out at our public meeting.

Finally we need all our old members and we need new members. If you have not received a renewal notice please get in touch; the loss of our treasurer resulted in a temporary hitch in our systems. If you would like a batch of our basic leaflet, which includes a membership application, let me know. Do not forget our website www.warick-district.org.uk/owl , which is one new way to give people more information.-----John Myers

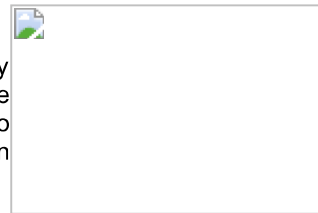
Next visit by Lee Hales

We are very pleased to say that we have been able to arrange for Lee Hales to go out to Bo on March 31st for a 2-week stay. This has been made possible through the generosity of The British Council in Freetown, who are paying a substantial part of the cost, together with the hospitality provided by Bo OWL themselves.

Lee is a 2nd year student in Computer Systems Engineering at Warwick University and has been giving technical support to Janet in refurbishing donated computer equipment He will be going out to set up a set of computers in a training or educational environment and ensure that at least 2 people are able to operate and maintain them and train others in their use. He will also assess their further IT needs.

Community Centre Progress

David Ngombu Bo OWL Secretary shows John Myers how close the new Centre will be to David's office in the old Railway Station



We are delighted to report that rapid progress on the building of the community centre is being made. The latest estimate is that the first story should be up to wall height by the end of this month. When John Myers officiated at the groundbreaking ceremony in December, they were just starting on the foundations

The plan is to build a first story before the rainy season sets in. The building can then start to be used and to prove its worth. Then we hope to identify new donors encourage them to donate with the assurance that it is already a going concern.

The completion of the first phase should result in a community meeting hall, an activity space for youth training and community groups, and an Information Technology room. The IT room will utilise some of the computers we have sent out; and be the basis for an Internet Café once the internet is available in Bo. The meeting room will be income generating. If possible the IT area will also have journals and other publications available for sale or reference.

The completion of the second story; will allow for a re-allocation of space, and the addition of more

activities, and the improvement of existing ones. There would then be a resource centre (IT and printed matter), a hall, a training space, an income generating guest suite with six rooms, a shop and a bar. The use of space will be flexible maximise meeting of need and income generation.

At present, we do have a problem. The building of phase one is likely to cost several thousand pounds more than we have raised. Twenty two thousand has been found for the building; but it is estimated that another seven or eight thousand may be needed. The Bo OWL committee are trying to economise whenever they can and will be sending a progress report with revised costings before the end of the month. Therefore we are launching a new appeal for phase one. This includes a public appeal in the hope that we might attract modest donations from a wider number of people entitled "A Tenner a Brick Make your Mark in Africa". Please consider approaching friends and family and any other likely person to contribute.



TENNER A BLOCK

- make your mark in Africa.

So far we have not given the public a chance to help the people of Bo help themselves. We would like invite individuals to donate £10 towards the building costs. In return we will write your name on one of the building blocks in the walls of the centre. This will be a way of immortalising your name in another part of the world that we are linked to in friendship. We will also have a book that records the names of donors on display in the Centre.

Notes from the Committee

Communication with Bo

Brian has maintained regular monthly postings to Bo and these are known to have arrived at their destination safely. We are indebted to the British Council in Freetown for this facility. However, we are disappointed that the OWL POSTBOX is not used by more than a limited number of people. And whereas the route is being used to get letters to Bo it is not being used for return mail.

However, we have been getting letters back by other routes, usually brought back by returnees who then post them on to us in the UK. Of course, both John Myers and Bruce Knight brought correspondence back with them when they returned.

John Myers has been in regular contact by telephone, which is proving to be mainstay of our communication with the Bo OWL committee. He now uses and recommends 09055 860860 for all calls to Sierra Leone at 25p per min.

Finance and Fundraising

Basically our funds are now very nearly exhausted, having paid the £24,000 towards the Community Project and the cost of the container of nearly £3,000 (although some of the latter will be recovered from Fr. Peter Konteh's supporters, who had the use of some of the space).

It has been highlighted that there is a potential shortfall of £7,000 in funding for phase one of the Community Centre. Bo OWL's undertaking to review progress regularly and to send us reports will help us anticipate exactly how much might be needed and when.

Whilst recognising that all our activities need funding it was re-affirmed that the fund raising for the community centre and for exchange visits are our top priorities. The committee has set up a fundraising sub-group and is also looking at the idea of recruiting a volunteer with a dedicated task in the awareness-raising/fund-raising area.

Library Project

We have a volunteer, Karen Marshall, who has started on a project to research materials that would be suitable for use in Leamington Library, since they have agreed to give One World Link some shelf space.

Feedback from Visits

John Myers has circulated full reports to the Committee on the Community Centre, School Links,

Civic Link, Community Links, and Bo Koloseum, which are available to others from him on request.

He also gave a general feedback at a Committee meeting on December 17th and has since spoken at the Unitarian Church in Warwick on 11th March.

Bruce Knight had a good trip and provided a brief report to the Committee on 20th January. He then gave feedback at a meeting in St Mary's Church Hall on 17th February.

The major feedback will take place at the Open Meeting on April 10th.

Schools linking

A small sub-group has been meeting monthly to nurture and sustain the links that have been undertaken by Castle Sixth Form Centre, Kenilworth; St Anthony's, St Peter's and St Patrick's Schools, Leamington; St Mary's School, Warwick; Brookhurst School, Leamington and Ferncombe School, Hatton Green.

The main focus of their attention is to support teachers in using the Bo Link in helping bring global aspects into the National Curriculum and Citizenship, as well as encouraging penfriendships between pupils and students.

Community linking

We want to set up a community-linking sub-group to take forward efforts to involve a wider range of community groups in the Link. Some progress has been made with a Rotary Club link

community groups in the LINK. Some progress has been made with a Rotary Club link.

Civic linking

Jane Knight, Bob Crowther and Nigel Roberts, a senior officer with Warwick District Council, attended a meeting in London with the Commonwealth Local Government Fund and the Local Government International Bureau.

It was also reported that Birmingham University has been commissioned by the Department for International Development to do a survey of Sierra Leone resources.

Bill Evans is hoping to go to Bo in November and could possibly combine this with a local authority visitor.

OWL POSTBOX

How to send letters and materials to Bo

Put your letter or package into another envelope or wrapping and send it to

OWL POSTBOX c/o 31 The Greswoldes Radford Semele Leamington Spa CV31 1TP
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This is a monthly service: please ensure that materials reach the OWL POSTBOX by **the last day of the month**

Please ensure that:

- There is a return name and address on your letter or packet
- Letters and packets are unsealed (British Council security requirement)
- No cash or 'things' are enclosed

Your letter or packet will then be forwarded to the British Council in Freetown that has facilities for delivering to Bo Town.

They will be taken to One World Link in Bo and distributed by them. (You may be asked to pay for the cost of sending bulkier items).

Further information and/or advice can be obtained from

OWL POSTBOX: Tel: 428635 or [e-mail](#)

A leaflet about penfriendships is also available - please ask for one.