

One World Link

The friendship link between Bo District in Sierra Leone and Warwick District, UK

www.oneworldlink.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 700714

Enthusied and inspired by their visit to Bo

A GROUP of six young people and four adult leaders have recently returned from Sierra Leone after a life-changing experience.

The party, led by Ben Wesson, Catherine Moody, Holly Jones, and Paul Atkins, was made up of students from secondary schools across Warwick District. The participants included: Helena Slater, 18, and Mairi Enticott, 17 (from Aylesford School), Clara Galloon, 18 (a current North Leamington School pupil), Hanisah Othman, 19, (a Warwickshire College student), Ben Sidaway, 16, (who is studying for his GCSEs at Kenilworth School), and Tom Williams, 16, (also studying at Kenilworth School).

Whilst visiting Sierra Leone, under the guidance of the adult leaders, the six participants delivered leadership skills training and ICT development sessions to their counterparts in Bo. They also held a number of global issues discussion forums, which aimed to give young people a time to debate issues affecting the wider world and an opportunity to come up with localised solutions. The group also went to Tiwai Island Nature Reserve, a traditional African village, and Tribe Wanted - a sustainable community - in Freetown during their two week stay.



Time for relaxation



Training for a football match

Catherine Moody, One World Link's Youth Coordinator, said: "The visit was a huge success and has gone some way to cement the relationship between the youth communities in Warwick and Bo districts." She continued: "Whilst in Bo, we participated in a number of activities which, I believe, have gone some way to improving the level of cultural understanding between young people at both ends of One World Link. Our group experienced wonderful drama performances, met with local youth groups, visited a traditional African village, and most importantly made lifelong friends."

"The excitement throughout the two weeks was palpable."

Ben Wesson, who was primarily responsible for organising the trip, said: "It was my third visit to Bo, and by far the most enjoyable, constructive and successful in my opinion. It was so inspiring to see how all of the young people reacted to their time in Sierra Leone."

Planning for a return visit

The group are now planning for the return visit of Sierra Leoneans, which will take place in summer 2013. Ben said: "We have a long way to go before the party of young people from Bo travel to Warwick in terms of both planning and fundraising, but I am excited about welcoming the young Sierra Leoneans." If you wish to contribute to the group's fundraising efforts for the return visit, contact Ben on: 07810 633518 or at: youth@oneworldlink.org.uk. To keep up-to-date with all of One World Link's youth activities, visit: http://www.oneworldlink.org.uk/group_1.html#youth.

Jane Knight, who was visiting Sierra Leone at the same time, said "The Bo adults were very anxious to take care of all safety and comfort aspects of the group. At the workshop sessions I was very impressed with the mature and thoughtful discussions on leadership and global issues which the Sierra Leoneans and English had. The excitement throughout the two weeks was palpable. The youth group in Bo is now concentrating on who to select to visit UK next year and how to raise funds so that they can contribute to the cost."

**COMING
SOON!**

15 July: Annual Napton Cycle Ride - a leisurely stroll on bicycle for adults and children. Registration from 10am. Ride starts at 11.30 and children's ride at 11.45. This year's event will support OWL.
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**COMING
SOON!**

Chairman's Notebook



John Myers' award from the mayor gave me chance to reflect on just how much a volunteer organisation such as ours rises or falls on the dedication of such people. Of course, all volunteer organisations are populated by motivated individuals, but the extent of the dedication and motivation are what makes the difference. As homo sapiens, our altruistic tendencies are one of the things defining us from other species, and there are a myriad of ways that we see this happening daily all around us, from picking up litter or helping out at the local soup kitchen to raising money for cancer research or destitute donkeys or prison visiting.

The list is endless and each individuals' input is valuable however modest or low-key it is. For it is this demonstration of the worth of caring for others and our communities on whatever scale that sets us apart in strengthening and building the bonds of our communities. And amongst all us millions of footsoldiers there are a number who seem to know no limit to the time or effort that they put in for others and John is one of these. He is a standard bearer, but what makes OWL so fortunate is not just that we can include him in our ranks, but that he's not alone. OWL's 30 odd years of existence is peppered with many such individuals, working and giving tirelessly for the link having discovered something there in our mission, that drives them on. How fortunate we all are.

Chris King

Africa stands for... courage, conviction, commitment, character, creativity, charisma ...

Stephen Peet, teacher at St Patrick's Primary School, Leamington Spa, reflects on the visit in February by five Warwick and Leamington teachers to their partner schools in Bo.

Wonderfully well-organised by OWL Schools Co-ordinator, Liz Garrett, and benefitting from wise advice from several OWL members, particularly John Myers, the teachers' visit to Bo in February formed the initial part of a Reciprocal Visit initiative funded through the Global Schools Partnership programme and DFID.

Two members of our party had been to Bo on the teachers' visit 12 months previously, and their eagerness and enthusiasm to go again raised the expectations of us first-timers to such a degree that I was preparing myself to be disappointed; I needn't have worried. From the moment the airplane doors opened, and we got our first blast of oven-like heat, through the hustle and bustle of Lungi Airport, our meeting up with the marvellous Maada, and the sardines-in-a-tin adventure of our car and ferry journey across to Freetown, we could tell this was going to be an extra-ordinary experience.

After a very comfortable stay overnight at the convent, and a deft re-arrangement of luggage in the car, we left bright and early from Freetown on our way to Bo. After a pleasingly uneventful journey (we had heard the tale of the mechanically-challenging trip of the previous year) we arrived at the OWL Centre in Bo and were shown to our rooms – beautifully



Teachers from 13 Bo Primary Schools attend a Global Schools Partnerships workshop at the OWL Centre in Bo

refurbished and redecorated since last year, much to Liz Garrett's delight and with understandable pride from the members of OWL Bo.

Our first daytime experience of Bo, outside the OWL Centre, was our attendance at the Sunday morning church services. For Diane Quayle and me, it was also the first sight of our partner schools, since for those communities, one of the classrooms doubles as the church hall on Sundays. Later that day, discussing the day back at the OWL Centre, it was evident that our experiences shared some common features – warm welcomes, sunny smiles, and soulful singing. I can still hear the voices.



Teachers from partner schools take a break from planning their Global Education Project on 'Water'

Next day, somewhat surprisingly (even to some of the Bo residents!), was a public holiday, and we seized the opportunity to meet and collaborate for the first time with teachers from our partner schools, sharing ideas and planning the teaching for the week ahead, the focus of which was the 'Write about Water' project; as a universal human need, with contrasting challenges in terms of its availability and quality in the UK and Sierra Leone, water had been our first choice of topic from the word go.

The following week flew by so very quickly. Days were filled with the challenge of teaching in classrooms with constraints of space, budget, and resources, feeling our way by adapting our usual child-focused, 'facilitation of learning' teaching style to suit both the setting and the prior experience of the children, this contrasting with the sheer delight of teaching children who were attentive, watchful, and so very eager to learn. Evenings were spent talking over the day's events, fuelled by the occasional Star beer at the wonderfully-named 'After Work' bar, a great deal of laughter, and the 'beyond the call of duty' companionship of Maada, Umeru, Joseph and others. The experiences were too many and various to detail here, but highlights that cannot go without mention are the road trip to the SALWACO water treatment plant, a warm meeting with the Mayor at the Town Hall, the extraordinarily brilliant Cultural Show showcasing the school children's fabulous singing, dancing, acting and writing, and the farewell party at the OWL Centre which rounded off our week in Bo in such a heart-warming and memorable fashion.

Though this was my first visit to West Africa, I was born across the continent in Uganda, and I have always stated, rather glibly I now realise, that "I am an African". Up until this visit, however, I had no real sense of what 'being an African' meant. Looking back to February, I clearly see that, as embodied by our colleagues-turned-friends (and the children) in our partner schools, our tireless and dedicated supporters at OWL Bo, and our own experiences during the visit, I know from first-hand experience that Africa stands for... courage, conviction, commitment, character, creativity, capability, capacity to teach, capacity to learn, collective effort, community spirit, co-operation, conscientiousness, constancy, charm, charisma, camaraderie, chin-wagging, cabaret, choral singing, colourful clothing, celebrations, crowded cars crammed with cases, chaperons, cassava casserole, and catnapping. And that's just the 'Cs'!

The next chapter in the programme is the reciprocal visit of teachers from our Bo partner schools, which takes place from 7th – 20th June. It will be fascinating to share our colleagues' first experiences of UK culture and education, and wonderful to have further opportunities to strengthen partnerships and deepen friendships that were kindled back in Bo.

Local Authority Round-up

From our special correspondent visiting Bo, Jane Knight



While spending a prolonged holiday in Sierra Leone, I was able to follow up various activities taking place between officers in Bo City Council and Warwick District and Warwickshire. Since 2007, there have been 4 programmes developed between the councils which went under the headings of Environmental Health and sanitation, Solid Waste Management, Finance and Planning.

ENVIRONMENT - Richard Hall at WDC and local rotary clubs with "Water for Kids" have raised £8,000 to assist BCC with extending toilets and clean water taps in one of the new markets in Bo. Richard has also agreed to help host another Sierra Leonean environmental health officer (Mohamed Koroma) under the Commonwealth Scholarship scheme. When Mohamed heard about it, he said he was the happiest man on earth!



Bo townspeople putting waste into a skip

WASTE MANAGEMENT - Glenn Fleet recently visited Bo and Makeni to see how the Solid Waste Management pilot programme had progressed. He was very pleased with the results despite numerous problems experienced procuring the machines and equipment. The scheme is so well thought of that I was able to take up where Glenn left off and went to Freetown to visit DFID's Martin Walshe with Maada Fobay. This was followed by a meeting at BCC with the Adam Smith Institute representative. We had a session on creating a concept for widening out the solid waste programme to the whole of Bo. There have also been discussions about working with the World Bank on a much expanded programme. Certainly all the people we met were enthusiastic. The visit to Freetown was quite hard work, it took three hours to get out from the centre of town and we had to curtail our visit as there was yet another shortage of petrol.

FINANCE - I talked to Alex and Bockarie who had a busy 2 months in Leamington last October being exposed to different accounting systems. Alex is very happy that now he is back he is enabling the council to raise more tax through his efficient systems. Bockarie is advising a number of decentralised ministries (e.g. Health) on how to set up proper accounts for local expenditure. They both feel their time in UK was very worthwhile.

PLANNING - John Archer's counterpart in Bo, Willie Momoh, has been waiting patiently to start working for BCC on gathering detailed information about the land use in the Bo area. His contract was signed after Easter and he is planning a questionnaire survey and has had a well attended meeting with local chiefs and landowners. Once the land use is mapped, it should be possible to start planning for future land use.

ELECTION LOOMING - Next November will be a crucial time for our partnership but especially for Bo citizens because the outcome of the national and local elections could mean quite radical changes to the political scene in the country, and according to the constitution the Mayor of Bo Dr. Wusu Sannoh will have to retire. So we will all be watching the results with anxious hopes for a replacement who will continue his exceptional contribution to the partnership.

Bo OWL Centre has a revamped computer room with laptops donated from Canada thanks to VSO Paul Fish. They have self-teaching software and my photo shows students hard at work.

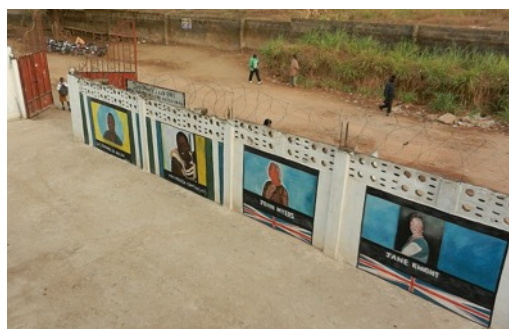


Students in the Bo Centre computer room

The Bo OWL Wall of Fame

BO OWL have immortalised some of the founder members of OWL by painting portraits on the wall in front of their Community Centre: Johannes Mallah (late), Mussa Conteh (late), Jane Knight, Raymond James (late), Myf Hodkin, Joe Kobba and Brian Austin.

However embarrassed the individuals may feel at being singled out for such an honour, it is a fitting tribute to them and many others who have made the link so successful over thirty years.



HAVE WE GOT NEWS FOR YOU!



OWL runs a **monthly news service** delivering to your desktop all the key news stories from Sierra Leone. It keeps you up to date with articles and features covering a broad cross-section of views and information. OWL Member **John Yates** runs the service and if you would like to receive the service, please email him on johnyates23@gmail.com

John's award from the Mayor

At the Leamington Town Meeting on 19th May John Myers was one of three citizens to be given a Mayor's Annual Award in recognition of commitment and service to the community. His work with OWL was the main reason given for this.

John says "we work as a team in OWL and it is embarrassing to be singled out, it could equally have been given to others in the team, but together I think we deserve an award"



... as portrayed on the Bo wall

Mental Health in Sierra Leone

John Archer reports on the latest OWL Talk

In a lively session on 22nd May, a fascinating insight was given into mental health issues within Sierra Leone. We heard about two initiatives.



Aminata Mansaray

Aminata Mansaray, a London based Sierra Leonean spoke about the support centre in her home town of Kenema providing guidance to families with members suffering from mental illness. Evil spirits are often blamed, resulting in isolation and abuse. In a country with only one doctor qualified in mental health, treatment is generally non existent.

However, Aminata showed us how families were receptive to explanations of the causes of mental illness and how attitudes could be changed to provide support. Advice, training and treatment was provided through the Marie's Day Centre for Mental Health she had set up with the support of Sia Nyandemo, drawing on her experience of a sickle cell charity and who spoke of her own tragedy of losing 3 children to the disease.

Jane Shackman described a larger scale three year CAFOD mental health project in Makeni. She identified the same problems and the need to gain wider understanding of the causes of mental illness. Provision of drugs was also part of the project, though older varieties, some with problematic side effects, often had to be used.



Jane Shackman

Changing the views of traditional healers on causes and treatments was important and some progress was being made. However, there was a long way to go to change perceptions more widely to reduce a significant source of suffering for families and individuals.

It was a fascinating evening; two excellent presentations; a good discussion and agreement to maintain contact.

A film about the power of forgiveness

One of the main objectives for OWL as stated in our mission statement is "To raise awareness of issues of global relationships". There are many ways of doing this and almost everything we do contributes either directly or as a spin off.



Holding public meetings and other events is still a core activity. So far this year we have put on two public talks on "Aid and Intervention" and "Developing Mental Health Services from scratch" (described above) and two public film shows "When China Met Africa" and "Fambul Tok". We will try to keep this going.

We would welcome all feedback and suggestions on how we might continue. We would very much welcome help in organising and promoting future events and activities.

All ideas, criticisms, offers please send to info@oneworldlink.org.uk.

Money for Nothing!

Don't forget that you can raise money for OWL with a click of your mouse - and it will cost you absolutely NOTHING!

By registering with easyfundraising.org.uk,

and choosing OWL as your beneficiary, you can shop online with all your favourite retailers and they will donate a percentage of everything you spend to OWL. So why not check it out and register today!

Every little counts!

Off the Shelf.....

OWL has a library of books on a range of relevant subjects which members can borrow. The OWL collection, which at present contains just over 20 books, is located in the Leamington Library in the World History section. They can be borrowed from the Library in the usual way.

In each issue of the Newsletter, we carry a short book review. For this issue, **John Myers** recommends two books that give a balance of adventure and reflection.

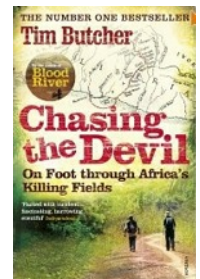
TWO NEW ACQUISITIONS FOR THE OWL SHELF in Leamington Library make for an absorbing read together. In the 1930s the introspective novelist *Graham Greene* made a 350 mile journey on foot through Liberia from its north western border with Sierra Leone and Guinea to its Atlantic sea coast. Part travel writing and adventure, part an exploration of his own soul, and part possibly to provide intelligence on the the slave trade. During the second world war, *Greene* did work for British Intelligence based in Freetown. 70 years later ex war journalist turned travel writer *Tim Butcher* made the same journey on foot. Instead of a large entourage of porters, *Tim* had just one guide, one "porter" on a motor bike, and light weight camping gear. More striking than the differences on these two arduous foot slogs were the many things in the lives of the ordinary people they met that had not changed.

Journey Without Maps

By *Graham Greene*

Chasing the Devil

By *Tim Butcher*



Journey Without Maps "reveals *Greene's* ravaging spiritual hunger, a desperate need to touch rock bottom both within the self and in the humanly created world." Says the *TES* grandly. For me it gives an insight into the writer, into a land and its people at a previous time, and a point of view which is beguiling and sometimes strange and uncomfortable. I wonder what West African readers might make of it.

Chasing the Devil by *Tim Butcher* says a reviewer "is a good mix of description of landscapes infrequently visited, comparison with *Graham Greene's* identical itinerary in the mid 1930s and observation of social anthropology. *Butcher's* theories on the extent to which local hierarchies and rituals in rural Liberia conflict with ambitions for modern statehood make interesting reading."

Both books are well written and give a balance of adventure and reflection. For me *Graham Greene* has the edge. Both journeys start in Freetown and describe travel by train and bus in Sierra Leone through Bo to the border area.

If you want to know more about any of the projects or topics covered in this issue, you can always visit:

www.oneworldlink.org.uk