

One World Link

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

www.oneworldlink.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 700714

Bo Youth Visit Warwickshire

Boats, planes, country walks, parliament, youth hostels and a warm welcome awaited the four from Bo. Cat Moody reports.

Four visiting members of the OWL youth group in Bo, Usif, Alpha, Docile and Florence, came to the UK for a fortnight to participate in a busy schedule of visits and activities. The visitors were hosted by the local families of those they had met during the visit of Warwickshire young people to Bo last year. The group of young people from both countries had plenty of social events, starting with a bang at the music festival in the Dell and finishing with a farewell barbecue. In between, and among many trips to the pub, they visited Warwick Castle and enjoyed a flight around the district from Wellesbourne.



Bo youth visitors with some of the organisers.

Despite this busy schedule of social events the group also managed to pack their days with community building and cultural awareness raising activities. The group enjoyed experiencing our education system with visits to primary and secondary schools, while the students enjoyed lively tales, and even a dance display, from Sierra Leone. They saw the Salvation Army at work, tackling youth unemployment, drugs and homelessness, and visited the Gap Community Centre to see their youth programme. On a trip to London they went to the Houses of Parliament to meet our MP, Chris White, to discuss international development issues, and met Shadow Minister for International Development, Tony Cunningham MP. After all this official duty the group then took well deserved time off, for a weekend away in the Wye Valley. They stayed in a youth hostel and took a somewhat tiring experience country walk, around the country park. The group then travelled to Cardiff, being almost on the way back, to get ice-cream on the front, and be thoroughly confused by the Welsh language. Back here they went to St Mary's Church in Warwick and were entertained to breakfast at the Ahmaddiya Mosque.

"the youth visit has been rated the best ever"

The group worked carefully to document their amazing efforts by recording a film of interviews and experiences compiled from both youth visits, to Bo and to Warwick. This was filmed and directed by one of the youth members in

Warwick, Tom Williams, and can be viewed at vimeo.com/72975131. The visitors also worked with a local radio station to produce a sound scape of their impressions of the UK. The sounds which stood out to them included the pedestrian crossing signal beep, the beep of a self-service check-out, the whoosh of the London Underground and everyone constantly offering them food.



A cultural show for schoolchildren

Writing after his return to Sierra Leone, the Bo Youth Coordinator, Usif Kamara, wrote "the youth visit has been rated the best ever" and made special mention of the families that had hosted them. "Special thanks to Mr. Maada Fobay (of Bo OWL) who spent his time to do all our applications. Huge appreciations to the UK team for supporting us financially and making our stay in UK a home coming." The Warwick OWL Youth Coordinator, Cat Moody, reflected on the visit by remarking "I think this return exchange

visit has strengthened our linked communities, as well as our personal friendships. It has been wonderful to see Warwick District through the eyes of our visitors, as well as seeing how the young people of the district have come together to accommodate our guests."

Chairman's Notebook



It is approaching a year since, with some trepidation; I took on the role of Chairperson of OWL. I was keenly aware of the huge commitment and contribution of those who had gone before me and of their longstanding experience of our link over the years.

The OWL way is to work together, of course and there has been considerable support and help from all the Committee and others who have kept us moving forward. I need not have worried!

2013 has been a very active year. An early visit by Jane Knight and myself to Bo enabled us to make contact with the new Mayor and the Council as well as seeing the teacher visit to Bo in action. Following this there has been the Bo teachers' return visit here in June, followed by the Bo Youth visit in July. All these visits demanded a lot of hard work in organising, undertaking and hosting, but were very worthwhile and beneficial to all concerned.

The OWL community in Bo is also very active and has completed both the set up and operation of the Bo Farm and the construction of a new residential building for investment and occupation

Great progress has been made in the new Bo Waste management project, in which OWL plays an important role in providing technical support and community linkage. We have developed a good working relationship with WelthungerHilfe, the German organisation overseeing the project and we are looking to a significant extension of the project over the next year or so.

As well as these major initiatives, we have seen many people take an interest in OWL and provide help and support where they can throughout the year. It is difficult to name some without seeming to ignore others, but our range of involvement is widening and we are grateful for all those who have taken up an involvement in OWL as well as those who continue to play their part. However, one name that can be mentioned is that of John Myers, who has made an enormous contribution to OWL over many years and who has moved away from the area for family reasons. His unsurpassable level of involvement in OWL affairs will be sorely missed. We wish him well.

Much has happened this year. Our link remains strong and we are still looking to maintain and improve international understanding through all that we do. We have good friends in Bo with whom we keep close ties and work together with to develop the link.

It has been a good year, thanks to all who have played a part and made a contribution to the work of the link. Thanks to you all.

John Archer

Better Understanding

Liz Garrett reports on 'Friends of Bo' clubs in schools and teachers visits

Teachers from 3 schools made an exchange during 2013 - Clapham Terrace and Brookhurst from Leamington and Budbrooke in Hampton Magna, Warwick.

All three schools have had active links for several years. Face to face contact like this is vital for sustaining a meaningful link where both parties are able to express views and share ideas for how the link can best benefit pupils and staff. We have so much to learn from each other. Several schools have started 'Friends of Bo' clubs, giving pupils more of a say in how the link works.



Pupils in 'Friends of Bo' Clubs from 3 local schools got together to inform parents and visitors about Bo and Sierra Leone

The OWL teachers group in Bo has certainly grown in numbers and commitment over the past few years as schools come to recognise the benefits of communicating with a partner in another part of the world. Communication is our biggest challenge but when a package of letters and children's work

arrives from your link school it makes it all worthwhile - here in UK we are constantly challenging our pupils' stereotypes of 'Africa' - educating them with some facts about real, normal people's lives rather than the negative messages they seem to absorb from our UK media and charity-mindset.

Different Challenges

Visiting in person really opens our eyes to the incredible challenges of teaching in Sierra Leone. We have a lot of respect for our colleagues in Bo who continue to teach despite their huge obstacles; minimal resources and lack of support from the government. Our schools are wonderfully resourced



Teachers planning their linking activities as part of the British Council "Connecting Classrooms" reciprocal visits

in comparison but our challenges come in different forms eg. the demands of 'Ofsted' and the obsession with continuous assessment!

Through teacher exchange visits with Bo both sides gain both professional and personal insights - it's such a unique opportunity which surely helps us become better informed as global citizens, inspired to help one another grow.

Liz Garrett is OWL's Education Coordinator. See our Education pages on oneworldlink.org.uk

A New Project in Bo

OWL is involved in the expansion of waste disposal in Bo. Glenn Fleet reports.

In June of this year Derek Greedy and I had a further opportunity to visit Bo for a week to evaluate the usage of the council present landfill sites. We had been asked to look at the two sites that are presently used and have the potential for disposing of Bo City's waste. The UK Government are paying for this project and are using an NGO called Welt Hungerhilfe who are working in the country and we are supporting them.

The council has started using an unofficial site immediately adjacent to the Bo/Kenema highway. We understand that the owner wants to see the land in-filled to bring it up to the surrounding ground levels for possible development in the long term.

The reason for the Council's interest in this site is due to a number of key factors. The site is close to a good road network, very close to the centre of Bo, resulting in good turnaround times, reduced fuel costs and reduced wear and tear on the vehicles compared to the council owned site on the Bo/Makeni road.

If any of you have been out to Bo and used the Bo/Makeni road leading to the official site it is in a very poor condition and is understood to have been constructed in the 1930's therefore the damage that could happen to vehicles could end up being very expensive. I am sure no maintenance has ever taken place since it was built.

Another part to the project is supporting small business develop in using recyclable materials. A number businesses applied for support. The support covered small amount for tools, but mainly skills base learning in Marketing and Developing the business. The photograph shows you one of the winning business that make bags out of water bags, that keep the inter bag dry.

At the end of the visit a technical report was produced to advise on a way forward.



We have a problem ...



... and here's part of the solution - recycling waste plastic to make bags with waterproof liners

On a different note, I have been very lucky to be part of the Solid Waste project since 2007 and what has struck me is how the Country and Bo City is steadily improving. The first time I visited the hovercraft sunk when entering Freetown and I was rowed ashore in a very sustainable wooden canoe, now it is the new fast taxi boats.

There was not really any tarmac road, but thanks to the Chinese you can now drive from Bo to Kenema in around 45 mins, to have a very nice meal with Bishop Patrick and in Bo they now have 900 solar powered street lights that have really changed the outlook of the city, and finally, we could not believe our eyes when we saw a new supermarket had opened that sell nearly everything that our supermarkets sell, including legs of lamb, Mars bars and Cornflakes.

Glenn Fleet is Warwickshire's Group Manager, Waste Management, and a key member of OWL's Local Authority Group

The Day of the African Child

Nearly five hundred children participated enthusiastically in this year's Day of the African Child at Telford Infants School.

Nearly five hundred children sang their hearts out and danced energetically to the sound of a drum providing a rousing end to the Day of the African Child. The day also included African drumming, story-telling, sports, Action Aid, displays by individual schools and a grand parade with banners and flags held high.

It was organised by OWL's education team led by Liz Garrett. The three visiting teachers from linked schools in Bo and other guests were clearly impressed – in fact the Mayor asked if he could come again next year!



The Grand Parade

There's a lot going on in Bo

John Archer reports his latest visit

I was fortunate to be able to visit Bo again in February of this year, my fourth visit in total and my first as Chair of OWL.

I met up with Jane Knight, who had gone out a little while before me and we were able to work together on many of the issues we needed to deal with. A real bonus was that we were also there during the teacher visit from Leamington, so we saw first hand all the work and community involvement that was happening on the education front as well.

With Bo OWL, we had the opportunity to meet with the Committee and explain the financial situation facing OWL generally over the next few years, showing how we were going to have to manage our funds carefully and be selective, both in the UK and in Bo on what choices we made about future schemes and programmes.

Bo Owl had invested both in farmland and in a housing development site and we were able to visit the farm, seeing how the cropping system operated and later being presented with a crop of rice to return to the UK. We also visited the development site, where Bo OWL had contracted for the construction of a bungalow that was to be used for renting out to secure an income, together with a surrounding plot that was potentially to be used as a recreation area, a land use that is in very short supply in the town.

We also took the opportunity to talk to the BO OWL youth wing regarding the visit that was to take place later in the year (see front page report).

Jane and I met with the new Mayor of Bo, Harold Tucker who was aware of OWL and sympathetic to it as a positive influence in the town. He is a former NGO worker and was very keen to see the development of private enterprise initiatives throughout the City. At our invitation and with OWL support, the Mayor is to visit the UK. We believe that will be a very beneficial visit and are very hopeful that our good relationship with the Council will continue.



Bo OWL's new bungalow will be rented out to support their activities

There was much discussion of the forthcoming waste management project and the Mayor's own ideas for partnership working on waste and we were able to see skips used in practice in sites throughout the city, not least, right in front of the OWL centre!

Contact was also made for the first time with Bo

District Councillors and officers. This is important as much of the development of the city has extended beyond the city boundaries and is taking place within the surrounding Bo District. It is important for both authorities to work together to coordinate on the needs of the whole urban area and we hope to be able to assist with that as our involvement continues.

We were fortunate to be able to meet up with representatives of influential organisations; UNDP in relation to economic development initiatives, the new Local Council's Association in SL, contacts in Bo from WelthungerHilfe, who support not only agricultural development project but also assist with the waste project organisation, and representatives from DFID in Freetown who were very supportive of OWL's local contact and support role in project work in the country.

Of course, it was not all work! It was wonderful to see old friends again, to take part in social occasions with much humour and good company, to see how Bo itself is improving, with new developments and cleaner, tidier streets and generally to immerse oneself again in a different, challenging but very special environment.

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Jane Knight and students at Bo School try to contact Kenilworth School on Skype. It almost worked!

Your membership of OWL

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or email membership@oneworldlink.org.uk

What's going on in Sierra Leone? Read the One World Link Newsblog tinyurl.com/owlnews

Our news service now has a web page of its



own. It provides extracts from national and international press about Sierra Leone with links to all the original articles

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