

ONE WORLD LINK

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

www.oneworldlink.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 700714

500 children enjoy the Day of the African Child

On Thursday 16th June St Anthony's Primary School in Leamington Spa was host to 500 children celebrating the International Day of the African Child.

The participating children came from 15 primary schools in Leamington and Warwick, each of which has a partner linked school in Bo. The school links are maintained through activities such as annual teacher exchanges, shared work and projects, pen friendships, school clubs, teacher and children's friendships and teacher training delivered in Sierra Leone.

The Day of the African Child celebration saw children enjoying a joyous day learning more about Africa and celebrate their links with schools in Sierra Leone. After a grand parade round the field in which the children processed with flags and banners proclaiming their school links, the children participated in a number of workshops - singing, dancing, music, sports, art and African storytelling. After a picnic lunch everyone gathered in the marquee for a Skype link with the Day of the African Child school

celebrations in Bo. It was a special moment when 500 children here started waving and cheering as they saw children in Bo on the 40 inch TV which had been set up specially for the video call. They heard a Bo school child delivering a speech about the value of the school partnerships, then sang a popular song in the Krio language called 'Tel am tenki'.

As part of the Day of the African Child, schools had also participated in the 'Send My Friend to School' initiative which campaigns to give every child the education that is their right. At the end of the day everyone gathered in the marquee for the grand finale where all the children joined in the songs and dances they had learned during the day. MP Chris White received the pupils' campaign messages, eloquently expressed by some Year 6 ambassadors from St Anthony's.

The celebration this year was extra special as it was also a chance to celebrate the reopening of schools in Sierra Leone after the Ebola crisis. During the crisis the Sierra Leone schools were closed and the whole education system was thrown into turmoil. However, the school links and friendships were maintained throughout Ebola. Schools here were able to make contact with their link teachers by text, sending messages of sympathy and support, and many of the Leamington and Warwick schools held fundraising events for their friends in Bo (including a 'Boogie for Bo' outdoor disco!) to help with post-Ebola support. With Sierra Leone now declared Ebola free, we hope that OWL will soon be able to send another group of teachers to Bo under the 'Connecting Classrooms' scheme of the British Council with return visits by Bo teachers in October 2016 and June 2017.

Liz Garrett (OWL Teacher Co-ordinator) says, "Strong bonds and friendships have grown between school communities and it is a joy to see children and teachers from the UK and Africa learn from each other and work together mutually."



Children in Bo packed the OWL Community Centre



Excitement as the children see the video link

Re-establishing our links with Peter Penfold

Peter Penfold CMG OBE was the British High Commissioner in Sierra Leone between 1997 and 2000 during the Civil War.

During the Civil War Peter became famous and widely respected throughout Sierra Leone for his work and support for the people of the country and was made an Honorary Paramount Chief. In his retirement, he has maintained close and active links with Sierra Leone, regularly visiting the country and supporting a number of causes close to his heart.

Peter has a long established link with OWL and our work, and we share many friends including those at St Paul's School for the Blind in Bo.

He is currently engaged in a project around Bo with Lion Mountains Agrico Ltd to improve agricultural production, particularly by encouraging more efficient growing and processing of rice. You can find out more at www.lionmountains.com

Hearing about Peter's latest work, and particularly its connections with Bo, we took the opportunity to meet with him in July. He will meet with us again when a delegation from Bo OWL visits the UK in October and will be speaking at an open evening we will be hosting during this time.



Peter Penfold

Chairman's Notebook



Sierra Leone continues to progress following the massive dislocation of the Ebola crisis and the link is also returning to normal. It has been an opportunity to reflect on the aims we share in our very different worlds and discussions I had in Bo during my last visit showed a purposeful organisation looking to find ways of ensuring its future.

We discussed the need to develop and share our ideas as to how the Link can maintain relevance in a changing world and we hope to continue that debate during the visit of Bo Owl Committee members here in the UK this Autumn. It has been a number of years since such joint discussions were held with our colleagues in Bo. The outcome last time was the adoption of a number of overall principles and aims which have guided the functioning of our link since then.

As with any organisation, there comes a time to review, amend and refine such aims to help with future progress. We will be working hard together to ensure that we have a guiding framework that is practical, properly reflects our desire to share experience and skills and, in some respects most importantly, to maintain old friendships and enable the development of new ones.

John Archer

Mair Evans and Paul Atkins visit Bo schools and develop cultural links

After a lengthy period without formal contact between the linking primary schools in Bo and Warwick District due to the Ebola epidemic, our primary aim during our 16-day visit in January was to reconnect the classrooms and re-establish the dialogue between teachers.

The welcome we received was overwhelming and the energy and warmth shown on each occasion very emotional. All the schools entertained us with singing, dancing and sharing of their work. We visited seven of the 14 schools,



Early learners in Bo

experienced nearly 100 classrooms and were humbled and grateful for the care and hospitality shown to us. We were able to take out learning resources and not only maintain the existing links but also develop new ones, for example, that between BDEC Messima and

St. Margaret's in Whitnash, that has gone from strength to strength.

As both of us have a background in the arts, we were also interested in exploring how intercultural understanding between our communities could be strengthened through artistic connections and projects. Sierra Leone has a rich heritage of dance, storytelling, music, poetry, visual art and crafts, and the visit gave us important insights into their culture and artists. We were able to meet a few practicing

artists, who often have to develop commercial ventures to support their own creative practices. Now back in the UK we hope to develop artistic collaborations, knowledge sharing and projects between Warwick District and Bo's communities.

Other news in brief

Planning in Bo - new initiatives?

In July, Philip Clarke and John Archer attended a meeting in London of planners, architects and lawyers who had working relationships on land use and planning issues in Sierra Leone. It was an inaugural meeting of a potential group of professionals who could exchange experiences and develop opportunities for working together on planning related work in Sierra Leone.

We learnt of an initiative by the Prince's Trust Foundation in association with the New Urban Agenda support of the new Sustainable Development Goals in the Commonwealth. This was in its early stages and was developing ideas to trial in appropriate cities. We discussed the potential to trial such an approach in Bo.

We have been having further discussions and more meetings are planned. As we have good relationships with Bo City and District Councils, there may be real potential here to develop such approaches through OWL and to start to address the problems arising from uncontrolled land use.

Leamington Peace Festival new links

Over the weekend of 18-19th June OWL set up stall at Leamington's Peace Festival. The festival promotes awareness of world and local issues and OWL has been involved for 35 years. Our stall served to both attract new members and connect with existing OWL friends. We also learnt about other links with Sierra Leone. For example, Coventry-based optician Alan Taylor is travelling to Sierra Leone this autumn with Vision Aid to help improve access to eye care services.

We were also supported at the stall by local midwife Helena White who runs the African Maternity Link (theafricanmaternitylink.co.uk) which provides training and support for midwives in Sierra Leone. She works in partnership with OWL and will be visiting Bo this November. One of the benefits of being at the Peace Festival is hearing from people who want to get involved with OWL's work – if you'd like to get more involved we'd love to hear from you. If you're at the Peace Festival next year please make sure you drop by and say hello!

Mayor of Bo's 2nd visit - renewed friendship

We were pleasantly surprised to be able to meet up with Harold Tucker, Mayor of Bo, during June. He was in the UK for a short break to visit his sister in London and contacted us whilst he was here. He came up to Leamington and was able to have a very good social meeting with a group of OWL members over lunch.

It was a good opportunity to maintain our friendship with Harold and hear how Bo City Council was progressing. It was clear that OWL is held in high regard in Bo and confirmed our continued good relationship with the City Council.



The OWL stand at the Peace Festival