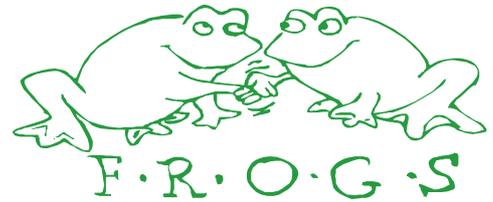


FROGS FANFAIR

MAY 2005



FROGS is a Registered Charity No. 1069168

MEMBERSHIP FEES AND NEW MEMBERSHIP FORMS

FROGS Membership Fees became due on 1st April. If you haven't paid please send your cheque along with the completed 'new style' Membership Form which you should have already received, as soon as possible. Please contact us if you require a new form – details below or download it from our web site.

Membership fees are £5 for families and £3 for concessions.

We look forward to your continuing support, but if we do not receive renewal by 30th June 2005 we will remove you from our Mailing List.

FUTURE EVENTS

OPEN GARDEN AT THE VENTURE, KITS COTY SATURDAY 11TH JUNE

11 a.m – 4 p.m.

**Come along to see Sally's Prizewinning Garden
Refreshments and Plant Sales
Entry Fee £1 per person**

SUMMER FAYRE

**Joint venture with The Friars
SUNDAY 26TH JUNE**

**PLEASE PUT THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARIES
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO MAN STALLS**

Items required – Bric a Brac and Toys please

Please contact us if you are able to help in any way

CONTACT INFORMATION

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**Keep up to date by watching our Website on
www.friendsofgambianschools.co.uk**

LETTER FROM AFRICA *(with apologies to Alastair Cooke!)*

Another sunny morning. The norm for May in The Gambia, although there are rumours that the rains will start early this year. It's 9.30 a.m. and the thermometer in my shady room is showing 85 degrees!! and it's very humid.

My new home is delightful. It's cool (ish), tiled and airy, and kept spotlessly clean by Bintou, my Maid. It's the custom to employ staff if you can afford it, and wages are very low by our standards. So I am 'Aunt Sally' to my staff of two – Amadou the Caretaker/Garden help is a gem, keeping everything watered and ensuring the plants are free of the ever present dust. Bintou keeps the house sparkling clean by brushing and scrubbing all the surfaces every day, and doing the washing and ironing. She's much more efficient than all our western appliances!

My most major life change is that I have learned very quickly to slow down!! My new rule of thumb is that if at the end of the day **one** task has been successfully completed then I have done well!! A forced change to meet the pace of living in Africa.

My day starts at 6.30 a.m. as it gets light, or earlier if I am hovering in sleep and hear the 5.00 a.m. call to prayer; then the birds join in, along with donkeys, cockerels goats and people.

Breakfast is 'tapalapa', a local bread, like a doughy french stick, costing 4 Dalasis (8p), with eggs fruit or jam. I am getting used to it. I buy vegetables from the roadside traders. Aubergines, courgettes, cucumbers, onions etc are all very good value, along with excellent melons, pawpaws and pineapples. Mangoes are not at their best yet. Other shopping is done at various supermarkets where availability is a bit hit and miss!! I buy meat from the one and only source – The Butchers shop.

So far my days have been well filled with a few visits to schools and nurseries, but I have mainly been trying to get the house furnished. It is not easy sourcing items, but I am slowly getting there and at least I now have comfortable chairs to relax in.

My limited skill in speaking french has improved considerably, as the Furniture maker that Amadou found for me only speaks french. So far so good, as the items have arrived as expected. No 5 legged tables yet!

So, my first visit is almost over. Just 3 weeks before I fly back to what? Rain, cold and the Garden Open Daysee you there. Sally

Bill Howell wrote the next article. Bill has made a great contribution to FROGS by transporting the containers to Aylesford and back to the ports, as well as providing his muscles during loading. We owe Bill a great deal, and were really pleased when he decided to go out to The Gambia with the 'team' in April, to see the 'end of the journey' for the containers.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Our flight from Gatwick to The Gambia was good, but my arrival at Banjul set the alarms ringing at Customs – panic, panic, but it was only my hairdryer!

As we left the airport I could not believe the number of broken down vehicles by the roadside, with their drivers underneath surveying the damage; and this was a good road!

After a quiet weekend we set off on Monday to visit a school about 2 ½ hours drive inland at Kanuma, where the Woodcarving Project has been set up (*see article*). It was my first experience of travelling in the bush – very bumpy and dusty – but worthwhile when we saw the school and the impressive models the children had made with guidance from the village Woodcarver.

Next day was a different story, when we visited a school in Bakau. The conditions were very poor and the 'team' were very disappointed, but this is Africa, and there is going to be good and bad alongside each other. I did find that on most occasions that the children were working well in difficult circumstances, and with minimum resources; they were always eager to chat and sing to us despite their lack of furniture or decent floors.

Wednesday was THE DAY for which I had travelled to The Gambia – unloading! I tried to direct the lorry drivers into the right position – it might have been easier for me to have driven myself. It was a very hot and exhausting day, but I can say I was there, and it has given me a better understanding.

At the weekend Dave, Adam and I crossed over to Jinack Island to see the school that had been redecorated by a team two years ago.

The Ferry was a real eye-opener! Lorries everywhere and hundreds of foot passengers carrying, pulling and pushing everything possible – including some very reluctant donkeys! I had to have a chat with more lorry drivers, and learned that they had only been waiting 2 days to cross – some may have to wait a week – glad it's not on my route!

We visited another Nursery School, which really impressed me. It was a community project way off the main road. The walls of a new building had been completed but there was no money available to pay for the roof. The children are meeting in a local house at the moment, but if the roof is not added then the walls will probably fall down in the rainy season, and their hard earned money will be wasted. The teachers and Head are so dedicated, and they deserve some help.

It has been a really valuable experience for me, and I can now understand why so many people have been involved – education is paramount for the future of The Gambia and if we can be part of it then I am sure God will guide us forward for the future.

I would like to thank everyone for including me as part of the 'team' and apologise to them for keeping them waiting while I tried to get a better money deal – which was not successful!

A WORKSHOP IN THE GAMBIA

Barbara Jordan

After one year in planning we were able to run a Workshop for Nursery teachers over a weekend during our visit. The Project had grown from a Head Teacher's request for help with ideas, which I had tried to give her in her school with children around but this had proved an impossible task.

We had invited 12 of our contact Nursery Schools to send two teachers each, and we were pleased that 11 attended, and arrived mainly on time!

The programme was intended to encourage the teachers to have fun with their children, while teaching through play. We had prepared many games for reading and maths activities that they were able to make and take back to their schools.

Saturday morning began with Singing Games, so we could get to know each other. We then split into groups, each with a FROGS member, to try out Reading Games – this was a great learning experience for everyone, and there was much hilarity. There was a lot of input from the teachers as to how 'our' games could be extended for use in their own situations.

We provided each school with a large box of basic materials which included card, pens, ruler, scissors etc, so after a break everyone began to tackle the making of some games. This proved a great challenge to many, as they had not had previous experience of cutting, measuring and gluing.

Saturday afternoon was assigned to Craft and we introduced simple ideas where they could use local resources -card/material –one of the ideas was the making of a jigsaw using a large picture glued to card (cereal packet), and cut into irregular shapes. However, before this could be tackled we had to show the teachers how to put a 'proper' jigsaw together as they had never seen one!

The favourite activity of the afternoon was 'dressing' a cardboard figure – there were some individual designs as the photo shows. It was extremely difficult to call a halt at the end of the day – they would have worked all night!



Sunday morning began with Singing Games reflecting numbers. It was interesting to discover that the teachers did not understand the meaning of words in Nursery Rhymes, which they had been singing for many years – we encouraged them to use words and situations that would be familiar to the children, and to also use equipment for games that could be found locally e.g. shells, stones and sticks for sorting and counting. This was followed by a time to experience number games in groups and then to make them.

We provided written instructions for all the games and ideas introduced so that, hopefully, the teachers would be able to continue to make more equipment in their own time. We were encouraged by the enthusiastic response from all the teachers and were delighted to see ideas being implemented in 3 schools the very next day, when we visited unannounced!

We all felt it was a very rewarding experience, and look forward to seeing results on our next visit. A request has already been made for a repeat programme next year.

Thanks to FROGS members' who were involved, and did not know that they could be 'teachers'!

NEW PROJECTS
David Jordan

In April 2004 Barbara and I were asked to visit a Lower Basic School in the village of Kanuma, some 2 ½ hours drive inland, by a VSO worker in The Gambia College.

When we reached the school we were given a rousing welcome. The school PTA and the village elders were summoned and the usual speeches given. In the middle of this a drummer turned up and the village ladies started dancing, and of course we were drawn into this and it turned into a real party!

On this visit we found out that there was a Woodcarver in the village, who was willing to run classes for the older pupils, but tools and a supply of wood was required. Estimates were obtained, and we brought them back to England. We felt that this was a very worthwhile project and recommended it to FROGS. It was felt that if good quality items were produced these could be taken to England and sold as FROGS merchandise. This would mean the project becoming self-sufficient and the school and local community would benefit.

The Committee gave the go-ahead for the project, and the money was taken to Kanuma in October 2004.

In April 2005 the FROGS team visiting The Gambia travelled to Kanuma to see how the project was progressing.

We saw the Woodcarver at the school, and he showed us some of the work done by his students. Considering that the students had only been learning for 6 months, the standard was very impressive.

Several of the carvings were brought back and displayed at the container handing-over ceremony in Bakau. I encouraged other schools to look at whether they could do similar Projects as a way of raising money for their school and community.



JIDAH NURSERY – FROGS DELIVERS THE GOODS
Adam Rawlinson

In 2001 I visited The Gambia and had my first taste of what poverty really means. The plight of nursery schools in particular had a major effect on me personally and I was very distressed at the state of one particular nursery, that being at Jidah. Three years ago Jidah nursery consisted of a single small “shanty” style hut measuring not more than 5x5m.



Crammed in this small building (despite internal walls and obstructions) were over 100 children aged about five or six.

Conditions inside were dire. Children were seated on old packing cases and had no desks. There was no proper blackboard – just a bit of wood - and no any sign of learning aids. There were no books or pens and children were learning by rote and memory alone.



There was talk of a new block being built by external funding – but sadly, no talk of learning material or desks and blackboards being arranged. Happily, FROGS made plans!

Being aware of the needs of this nursery, the next container was loaded with chairs, tables, books and support materials, all destined for Jidah.

This year during my visit to The Gambia, I was told things had improved at the school and naturally, I asked to taken there to see.

And things have indeed improved! A new double classroom nursery block has been built. This is a proper brick building, with proper floors, windows (no glass of course) and a good roof.

The Nursery education here is now split into two classes, each occupying their own room.



Situations inside have improved dramatically as is evident when you walk in. Each child now has a chair and desk space. The walls are smothered in learning aids and charts. There is a blackboard at the front of each class, and around the edge of each classroom are trays and cupboards with books and materials. Last time I had visited this school I had been told that the teacher had to make a single stick of chalk last for a week. This time I was told that due to FROGS there are now no such restrictions.

As can be seen, the rooms are light and airy and nowhere near as cramped as before. It is slightly concerning



that although there are two classes, due to increased intake numbers there are now 85 children per class. However, a second block is currently under construction and this will hopefully enable further division and reduction in class numbers. The children and staff, needless to say, were all smiles and songs!

I got the overwhelming impression that marvellous improvements had been made and I left feeling that FROGS have indeed played a major part in ensuring that

the early education for the children in and around Jidah will be well catered for in the future.

I hope and pray that in whatever way FROGS operates in the future, that such direct and palpable assistance will always be the result.

DRAMA COMPETITION ABOUT MALARIA *Maggie Parkins*

Malaria prevention is high on the agenda in The Gambia. Thus it was that one evening a group of FROGS members at in the open air arena at the Franco-Gambia Alliance waiting to be entertained by children from six Lower Basic Schools, as they presented their own 15 minute dramas about malaria and the importance of education for its eradication.

The whole event was Gambian style – timing relaxed, television soundman casually joining the children on stage to arrange his microphones as they performed, people arriving late and drifting along the rows. The only professionals were the children themselves!

The message was much the same from each group – keep your compound free of litter, cover the well, don't allow water to stagnate, use mosquito nets and remember to dip them in deet regularly. When symptoms develop go to the clinic and don't rely on folklore to prevent or cure the illness.

However, there were some surprises – a school that over-ran by 10 minutes, its actors' being stopped in full swing by the Judges, even though the audience was engaged with the antics of the young boy who was acting as translator. If there had been a roof it would have been brought down!

Mam Tamsir, Gambian singing star, educator and friend of Barbara and David Jordan, was Master of Ceremonies and invited Barbara to give one of the prizes and suggesting that FROGS members might like to dance on stage with the teachers! David Jordan starred with an unusual interpretation of native African dancing, and deserved an award of his own!

While the judges had their discussions, Mam invited the children in the audience to dance to his latest CD. A mass of youth rushed onto the stage and danced with complete joy and abandon. An intriguing dance was one in which the dancers repeatedly bent over, touched the floor, and proffered their backsides to the audience!

The moment arrived when the judges came down to the stage. Mam had the difficult job of trying to cover the confusion. Paper flapped in the air as they flicked through their notes. Finally the winning school was announced Serrekunda Lower Basic. For a few minutes cheers and applause mixed with the tangible disappointment of those that didn't win!

But as far as FROGS was concerned all the students were winners in their efforts to combat this deadly illness.