

FROGS FANFAIR

July 2009



FROGS is a Registered Charity No. 1069168

COFFEE MORNING

Please support Sue and Paul Warren, two new members who are holding a Coffee Morning for FROGS, details below— a big thank you to them both.

Sue and Paul
Invite you to a

Coffee Morning
and Garden Party

22 August 2009
10.00am to 12.30pm
Inside if wet!!

42 The Goldings, Rainham ME8 0AX
Telephone: 01634 372508

£2.50 Entrance - Including Refreshments

All funds raised are in support of FROGS
(Friends of Gambian Schools)

Bring and Buy and Raffle
FROGS Information Stand – Gambia Goods

FROGS is a Registered Charity (1069168). FROGS Members, who are resident in The Gambia, manage projects approved by the UK based Management Committee. Funds raised are used in The Gambia to provide the materials and local labour to complete the selected projects—this ensures that ALL the resources we provide go directly into the community—for the benefit of the community. Last year £ 8,798 was raised, including memberships and Gift Aid. We have almost completed 15 Projects this year, costing £6,800 and, unlike larger charities, only 1% of funds raised were used for administration, the majority of this being used to transfer the funds to our Gambian bank account. Current projects include school building, furniture and equipment improvement, learning and child feeding programmes and self sufficiency initiatives (such as vegetable growing).

PLEASE COME TO OUR GARDEN, JOIN US FOR COFFEE AND HELP FROGS!!

SUMMER FAYRE 2009

Lynne Davies, Treasurer

Despite a poor response from members, the weather was kind to us and we all had a tiring but fun day.

We raised a massive **£888**.

Thank you to Sue and Paul Warren, Sheila Jones, Cynthia Reynolds, Shelagh Fitzpatrick, Joan and Peter Fox, Kirsty, Kevin and Jake Hawkins, Sue and Ken Townsend who helped in making the day such a success. (and I must add Lynne and Sally too! Editor)

Quiz Evening

On Friday 9th October 2009

7.30 pm

Tovil Scouts HQ, Strawmill Hill, Tovil,
Maidstone, Kent ME15 6FL

Teams of 6 required

£6 per head

Ploughman's Supper included

Please bring drinks and nibbles

To book a table please ring Lynne on

01622 761823 or email

sue@friendsofgambianschools.co.uk

GIFT AID

By a simple signature on our Membership Form by those of you paying tax, we are able to claim back tax for FROGS through the Gift Aid Scheme.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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Keep up to date by watching our Website on

www.friendsofgambianschools.co.uk

Money Well Spent? - Malcolm Reader

It was very satisfying to hear that the Summer Fair this year raised more than £800 for FROGS. This splendid total was achieved by the hard work of very few people, and is a great credit to their efforts.

With this sum added to the FROGS bank account, Sally and I can return to The Gambia with the knowledge that we can continue to seek out fresh projects for FROGS to sponsor. But the money will not go far! If we could squeeze three projects out of this sum, then everyone would be delighted. Two projects would be acceptable, but 1.5 projects is the most likely scenario.

For those FROGS members not lucky enough to share in the receiving, the estimating, the investigating and the final rubber stamping of projects, certain facts might be of interest.

A bag of cement in The Gambia costs twice what it does in the UK. In times of shortage, which is not unusual, the price can easily escalate to three times that of the UK. This of course not only makes new projects more expensive, but if a project is already under way, the original estimate can be blown out of the window. Quality timber is a rare resource in The Gambia, so mostly needs to be imported, as does steel for shuttering. Although the price of these materials do not fluctuate as much as cement, a shortage can either put additional costs onto a project, or even bring it to a halt. Again we would expect to pay double for these materials than we do in the UK.

Price fluctuation is one of the greatest dangers to a project, but another is over optimism. We occasionally turn down a project on the grounds that it is too expensive. Not usually in terms of value, but in sheer size. Because of this, some Head Teachers, when submitting a project, cut it to the bone to gain acceptance. The problem then is, once the project has started, any variation in the cost of materials, transport or labour can mean a request to FROGS for more funds, which are not always available.

The most successful and satisfying projects are the 'self-help' projects. These are the ones where a village or community comes to us with an idea, aligned with an offer that if FROGS can fund the materials for a project, then the community will provide the labour. This offer tends to come more from the up river regions.

Again, we have seen both sides of this story.

We have seen successful conclusions, where projects have been finished on time and to a good standard of workmanship. We have seen projects already under way, where the volunteer labour has had to down tools and return to their farms to prepare their land for the

rains. Completely understandable. We have had similar projects where, after starting the project, the volunteer labour has turned round and asked for payment. I do not know the Mandinka for "On your Bike", but that is our response.

The FROGS manifesto now includes ambitions that all regions in The Gambia should receive equal help, and where possible this is carried out. But different regions carry different problems.

In the most densely populated areas, such as the Kombo Regions, the cost of labour is higher than the sparsely populated Upper River Regions. However, in these areas we can expect to pay much more for materials, and the cost of transporting these materials from the nearest large towns, to villages miles from anywhere can be prohibitive. Yet it is these villages that always seem to express the greatest thanks to FROGS for the help they have been given, and even seem to complete the projects more quickly.

But on the whole all recipients of FROGS projects are grateful, and under the beady eye of Sally, do not attempt to waste the hard earned finance that FROGS provides.

Why not come and see for yourself!

Trinity College, Leeds help Gambian school *David Jordan*

A team of eight, first year female students, from Trinity College ,Leeds, travelled to The Gambia at the beginning of May, together with their Tutor Sarah and her son. They are studying courses which involve working with children and young people and the visit was part of their work placement for their first year. Their objective was to refurbish two classrooms at Bijilo Lower Basic School. Frogs funded the materials and the team provided the labour - they were helped by three Frogs members, Sally, Barbara and Dave and two other helpers.

The two Grade 1 classrooms were washed and the walls given a coat of white emulsion paint before the students could begin to paint relevant teaching aids on the walls. These included days of the week, months of the year, numbers and especially the pictures and letters for Jolly Phonics which is becoming increasingly important. The Frogs team painted the outside of the block and the furniture from one of the classrooms.



Washing the walls!

The teachers and children were delighted with their new surroundings and the rest of the school was very envious. They were encouraged to be patient as another team of young people will be coming in November to continue the work and Trinity College hope to make an annual visit as part of the work placement for their students.



The result after a lot of hard work!

As this was the first experience of such a project for both Frogs and Trinity many valuable lessons were learned for similar projects in the future. The students coped very well with the heat and limited resources. The school held an assembly on the Friday morning to thank everyone for all their hard work. Frogs would also like to thank Sarah, Amy, Angela, Emma, Jodie, Laura, Natalie, Philippa, Roisa and Jack for their time and energy.

Frogs, and individual members of Frogs, have put much time and effort into helping this school and we are hoping that the Education of the children here will be enabled to move forward.

Building our first school with local help
Sally Reader

In June 2008, Malcolm and I travelled up country to visit a project at Barrow Kunda LBS, and en route to deliver gardening tools to the Basic Cycle School at Nyaga Bantang.

Whilst at Nyaga Bantang we met a US Peace Corps Volunteer named Ellie. Ellie was stationed at Paleleh, a small farming village in the Central River Division. Her field was agriculture, but whilst living in the village she was approached by the village committee to ask if she could find someone to help them build a school. She approached FROGS through us. Paleleh is a remote farming village in one of the driest and hottest parts of The Gambia and is very poor.

The children from the village aged 5 years upwards, had to walk 5 km to the nearest school. The village was willing to make the blocks and provide labour, but needed help to buy cement, wood for roofing and door frames and corrugate for roofing and doors, and window shutters.

Once FROGS agreed to help financially, Ellie volunteered to supervise the building and purchase the materials. By dividing the village labour force, the villagers made the traditional mud blocks, thousands of them, and still managed to work their farms during the rains.

By the end of the rainy season the basic building was in place - three classrooms and a teacher's room. The walls were rendered inside and out and the roof was on but not quite finished. A little more money was needed.



Half way there!

At this time Ellie completed her tour of duty, and returned to the USA. She was replaced by Jess, who agreed to step into her shoes and help finish the project.

The school is now in use. The floors are still being worked on; they are being tiled to make them more

durable than plain concrete. The walls are painted white with the lower half green and there is some furniture but a need for more.

At the end of May a handover ceremony was organised and David, Barbara, Malcolm and I travelled up to take part. Unfortunately the President was doing his annual "Meet the people" tour and so all our invited guests were unavailable that day!

As there was a howling wind and a dust storm blowing, we could hardly breathe, so the actual handover was a very low key affair. The following week, however, the villagers and regional officers, chiefs etc. had a great celebration and the school was officially inaugurated.



The ceremony during a dust storm!

Jess still has 15 months at her post and is willing to continue working with the teachers and PTA to develop the school. She has encouraged them to build a local kitchen and plant trees, so the school will thrive. We will visit again as soon as possible and hope that this time there won't be a dust storm!!

Off-duty FROGS in The Gambia! –Margaret de Wolf

Only FROGS member in The Gambia (according to Sally – and she should know?!)

It was decided that Sally Reader deserved a day off so, with her daughter, Alison, (a loyal FROGS supporter on holiday from the UK), Barbara Jordan (escaping from teaching Jolly Phonics), we set off to the Farm. So what did that mean?! Well, it's a misnomer really but, nevertheless, it led to an enjoyable day.

The Farm is an agricultural area growing a wide selection of vegetables, herbs and plants. It comes under the umbrella of Concern Universal and aims to establish a standard for the items sold under the banner of GIG – Gambia is Good. Gambian "farmers" are encouraged to improve the quality and variety of the items that they grow so they can enjoy a better life style when their income increases. This means a fundamental change for them as they tend to grow only the items with which they are familiar – cassava,

cassava and cassava – for which there is little ex-pat and restaurant demand. I recall talking to the owner of a long-established restaurant in the tourist area who would have welcomed a reliable and year-round supply of salad items and herbs – well, hopefully, her requirements will be available.

We enjoyed a tour around fields of healthy looking vegetables - broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, lettuce, onions, sweet potatoes, et al - and admired the raised beds of herbs and also a trial of hydroponics. There is an impressive irrigation system; in The Gambia, apart from residential areas, it is necessary to dig individual wells or boreholes but, as I understand, there is an adequate and long-term water supply in the two aquifers (one at about ten metres, the other at thirty) that drain in from higher ground south of The Gambia - The Gambia is very flat and there are no lakes or reservoirs.

We were also shown the prototype of a gas burner using methane from decaying vegetables and vegetation. There are several trials being undertaken (including Alison who attempted it when she returned to the UK but has been told that, as the Wirral isn't as warm as The Gambia, it won't work!); in fact, in the village near to where I live, one family is using animal waste to create gas for cooking.

Following our walk, we relaxed in an attractive and airy restaurant whilst chefs from the best hotels prepared our lunch. To encourage the understanding of Gambian cooking using high quality local produce, the top chefs have formed an association and, whenever the Farm has visitors, two or three of them are called into action. They prepared a local dish – Fish Benechin – that took about an hour to cook; we were encouraged to watch and ask questions. We were served with salad as a starter, complete with a tasty dressing – far better than I have ever achieved - and it's a long time since I had such a delicious and crispy salad. The main course was served with al dente vegetables – I had never thought of leaving cabbage attached to the core for cooking so that it could be served on top of a meal and be crisp and tasty. The sweet was marble cake that had been cooked in a solar oven and had risen beautifully.

An enjoyable few hours with delightful company, an interesting tour and a delicious meal – what more could anyone ask for?