

A Brief Report by Brian Austin on his visit to Bo, February 10th – 25th, 2006.

Introduction

Having been associated with One World Link for the best part of 20 years and not felt that personal commitments enabled me to visit Bo, I thought that the visit of the 3 teachers on the British Council Global Partnerships scheme offered me an opportunity by joining them.

Aims

My stated reasons for going were:

- To come now that I am free of other commitments to make the journey
- To visit all my friends in Bo
- To visit in particular my personal friend Mr Joe Ben Taylor
- To be of assistance to the Teachers during their visit, if that is possible
- To liaise with Joseph Boakarie concerning the respective Teachers Groups
- To do anything that I can to further the relationship between Warwick District OWL and Bo District OWL

What I did while there (see diary at end for more detail)

- Stayed at the Countryside Guest House with the visiting teachers, travelling into Bo with them each morning and enjoying their company on other occasions, but in reality they were more of a support to me than I to them!
- Had the opportunity of spending time with Joe Ben Taylor on a number of occasions.
- Visited a number of schools, both some that had existing links and also some at the request of Bo-OW, involving discussions with the Principals, talks and speeches to assemblies and classes, and tours of their facilities. Details are listed at the end.
- Taken on visits to local dignitaries, Gondoma (UNHCR refugee camp, River Sewa and waterworks) and Nbanja Town (village just outside Bo).
- Had dialogue with various members of Bo OWL, in particular with David Ngombu, Joseph Boakarie, Joe Pyne and Joseph Bangali, but also met with Johannes Mahler, Maada Fobay, Solomon Gbangbanieh, Jane Nyambe, Teresa Bangali, V.V. Bockarie, Josephine Komeh, Joseph Kaipumoh, Fr. Peter Conteh, Pius George and others who were most helpful to me.
- Attended and took part in (to varying degrees) the Welcome of the Teachers, the Youth Launch at the OWL Centre, the Bo-OWL Executive meeting, meeting with Kayoma women's Groups, Teachers' Group workshop, Bo-OWL Executive workshop and the Farewell Party.
- Had first-hand experience of the OWL Centre in Bo.
- Had contact with the Catholic communities at St Francis' and St Teresa's Parishes.
- Invited to Joe Pyne's Silver Jubilee.
- Took photographs, not only for my own benefit, but also for possible teaching resources and for our linked schools. I came back with a library of 767 images! (Available on CD on request)
- Had 5 extended walks (as well as 9 Honda taxi rides), over most of Bo Town and, using a draft UN map, identified the location of linked school sites and the whereabouts of other places and establishments.
- Tried to imbibe the atmosphere, ambiance and milieu of Bo Town, its community and the social and economic reality there. Listed prices of commodities and incomes.
- Had the experience of a lifetime!

EVALUATION

What was good?

- Overall, I think I fulfilled the reasons I set out before coming and I have had a unique, unforgettable, personal experience.
- Meeting and spending time with my friend and long-time correspondent Joe Ben Taylor
- Seeing the Centre for the first time
- A better appreciation of Bo Town as an energetic, pulsating, vibrant society.
- Experiencing a completely different culture and way of life.

What was not so good?

- The time was short. Having started to find my way around and get used to living in Bo, it was time to pack up and leave.
- My programme was very full: I was asked to do a lot more, for example visiting other non-linked schools, than I had expected. And UMC and New Gerihun Road linked-schools were not visited until the end of the trip.
- The presence of so many 'in-your-face' aid agencies.

What will I take away?

- The sights and sounds of Africa: the heat, how 'green' Sierra Leone is, the smiles of the children, the singing in the churches and the schools, the sound of the weaver birds hidden in the trees, the red-brown dirt roads, the continuous 'peeping' of the horns of the traffic.
- A concern that I will not be able to meet the level of expectation Bo-OWL has of me.
- The hope that I did not make too many mistakes, nor offend too many people, although inevitable.
- A resolution to be a better communicator with friends in Bo in the future.
- Hopefully, a better understanding of the reality of Africa and its needs and a consolidation of the opinion that the future of Sierra Leone rests primarily with its own Government.
- A concern that the African culture could become diluted by European/Western influences, not always for the betterment of that society.

SOME SUGGESTIONS, IDEAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- To have an OWL member or volunteer to arrange and co-ordinate requests for **pen-friends and correspondents**.
- To review and revise our guidelines for people **writing** to someone in Bo.
- To consider **sending letters** and aero-grams **direct** to Bo. It should not be necessary to use the British Council except, perhaps, when sending items of some value. I am therefore recommending that the OWL POSTBOX service is scaled down.
- To have an **umbrella partnership** agreement of aims and objectives between the **Teachers' Groups** at both ends.
- That we establish a **minimum set of standards** for schools participating in the Link.
- To pursue the expansion of our **website** to include teaching materials (proposed for a long time) and other resources and articles with some vigour.
- Better information for **travellers to Bo** and the preparation required, possibly on the website.
- A programme of **induction and enculturation** for visitors to Bo going under the aegis of the Link.
- To **encourage** more organisations and individuals to have **links** with counterparts in Bo
- To support the Women's **Credit Union** by having OWL members here become members (if possible) and make deposits, so that they have more funds available for their members.
- To prefix a statement to our literature, website, etc. to say something to the effect that:
*"OWL is a Community Group. Although it is a Registered Charity, it is **not** an NGO/Aid Agency. It is organised by ordinary people leading ordinary lives, without any income other than a small subscription, working voluntarily to engender mutual understanding in an increasingly disparate and polarised world"*

DIARY

Friday 10th

Leave Warwick Parkway at 7 a.m.

Saturday 11th

Arrive Lungi Beach Guest House 3 a.m.

Immediately bitten!

Journey Lungi to Bo – if I described it, you wouldn't believe it!

3 p.m. **Reception** at the **OWL Centre**

Go to Countryside G.H.

Visit by **David Ngombu, Joseph Boakarie, Joe Taylor.**

Visit by **Joseph Bangali** (Creative Skills Centre)

Sunday 12th

St Francis Parish – Mass at Immaculate Heart Church

Shown a 'factory' making **gari** from Cassava tubers.

Meal and time with **Joe Ben Taylor and Lois** at his home.

Meeting to discuss **programme.**

Monday 13th

Visit to **Christ the King College** (for Trinity School) accompanied by Joe Ben Taylor and Danny

Walk to town down Dambala Road, via Bo Commercial School (1.1/2 miles – sweltering hot!)

Meal with Joe Ben Taylor – Milton Restaurant.

Visit to Bo-Kenema Power Station (BKPS) Offices – meet with **Johannes Mahler** and **Maada Fobay**

Tour of the **Bo OWL Centre**

St Francis v UBC **Football Match**

Immaculate Heart **Liturgy Group**

Tuesday 14th

Visit to **Dignitaries**: Chief education Officer, Paramount Chief, Police Chief, Hospital Administrator, Southern Regional Officer
Joe Pyne's **Silver Jubilee celebration**

Wednesday 15th

Visit to **Ahmadiyya School** (for North Leamington School) accompanied by Jane Nyambe

Walk back to Town Centre (1 mile)

Internet Café – power failure!

Meal at BKPS and visit **Madam Woki's** with Maria and Jane

Cultural show by children at Teachers' Union centre

Relaxation at **Josephine Komeh's**

Thursday 16th

Visit to **Bo Commercial School** (for Bo OWL) accompanied by Solomon Gbangbanieh and Danny (joined by Jane Nyambe)

Walk to Bo Commercial from town and back (1 mile each way)

Visit **Holy Rosary Primary School** (for St Mary's, Warwick) accompanied by Teresa Bangali

Executive Committee meeting at the OWL Centre

Visited by **Joseph Bangali** of Creative Skills Centre – discussions

Friday 17th

St Francis School, Assembly, photographs and presentations – farewell to Joe Cannon

Teacher's Group workshop (late)

Lunch at BKPS and then **walk** with Alison back through the **Town Centre** all the way home to Countryside (**2.1/2 miles!**)

Meal with **Joe and Lois** at Countryside

Saturday 18th

Youth Launch at the OWL Centre

Trip do **Gondoma** – Water Works, River Sewa and UNHCR Refugee Camp

Meet Frs. **Brian Starken** and **Peter Conteh** at Countryside

Meet **Kayoma Women's Groups**

Meal with Fr. **Peter Conteh** at St Francis

Sunday 19th

St Teresa's Catholic Church for Mass – speak to congregation

Visit **St Mary's Home for Children**

Walk through New Site and the Coronation Field to the outskirts of Bo and then, after a Honda ride, on to **Nbanja Town** outside Bo and reception by Joseph Kaipumoh (?) (Adult Literacy project)

Meal at **Lois's** with David, Joseph and Joe

Time with **Joe Ben Taylor**

Teachers' Evaluation meeting and signing of agreements

Monday 20th

Time at Countryside

Visit to **Creative Skills Centre** – Joseph Bangali – tour, photos, meal and presentations.

Executive workshop at OWL Centre (late)

Lunch at BKPS followed by visit to **Market** with Teresa and Alison

At leisure at Countryside

Tuesday 21st

Schools visits with Joe Cannon

Bo School – Assembly and Principal
Milton Comprehensive – 'Royal' reception, assembly, speeches, tour and Principal

Queen of the Rosary – discussion with Deputy Principal
UMC School (for Telford Infants) – reception, singing and dance, meal and exchanges

Interview with Government Radio for broadcast the next day (not heard)

Walk to OWL and then back to J B Taylor's
OWL Farewell Party

Wednesday 22nd

Leave at 6 a.m. – Bo to Freetown in 4.1/2 hours!

Go to Charm's Beach Guest House, Aberdeen, near the coast.

At leisure on the beach – and a swim in the Atlantic

Visited by **Joe's children**, Prince, Messie and Boima

Thursday 23rd

At leisure in hotel

British Council meeting with Tom Walsh, Cordelia Davies and Wilmellia Okrafor

Market in Freetown for artefacts

The beach and swimming!

Friday 24th

Taxi to British Council, transfer to Astraeus Office and bus to Lungi via the ferry

Meal at airport and flight home.

Saturday 25th

Arrive Warwick Parkway 10.15 a.m. with John and Alison's parents to meet us.

Home 11 a.m., bath and bed!

SCHOOLS VISITED

Primary

St Francis Primary (Upper) (St Anthony's)
Kakua Primary (Ferncumbe)
UBC Primary (Brookhurst)
UMC New Site (Telford Infants)
Holy Rosary (St Mary's)
New Gerihun Road (Emscote Infants)
Main Sewa Road (Clapham Terrace)
Messima Primary (Shrubland St)
RC Model School (next link?)

Secondary

Ahmadiyya (North Leamington)
Christ the King College (Trinity?)
Queen of the Rosary (Joint with CKC?)
Bo Commercial (next link?)
Milton Comprehensive (no link)
Bo School (no link)
Methodist High (no link)

- visited by:

- Joe Cannon (and Brian)
- Sarah Davies
- Alison Bryan
- Brian and Joe
- Brian
- Sarah
- Alison and Jane Shakespeare
- Alison
- Maria Franchi

- Brian
- Brian, Danny Foulstone and (later) Joe
- Brian and Joe
- Brian and Danny
- Brian and Joe
- Brian and Joe
- Maria and Danny