

David Bale's Quaker and World Wide Connection Family

Newsletter

May 2019



Preface

Much of this newsletter is about an area in western Kenya called Homa Bay, where, to my surprise, I now find I am building a school!

Caption to picture (left): *Some of the children at Bethesda Joyland Centre (BJC) on Mfangano Island where I am building a new school for orphans, with much help from friend & neighbour, Keith Lawrence, a retired structural engineer, and my online teacher friends in Kenya, Lavender and Samwel Odida. The building to the right is a block of four classrooms. To the left is the large water tank that is needed for a reliable water supply to the school.*

Homa Bay has a lengthy shore line beside Lake Victoria. Over the past four years, I have come to know some of the people living here very well, via online conversation and the exchange of pictures, but not by actual visits. I'm being urged to visit many places in Africa but I am yet to visit any of them. This is not due to any lack of desire to do so. Of course, I want to visit them all!

Until very recently, due to difficult personal circumstances, I found myself unable to visit anywhere more a couple of hours away from home. Widowed just over a year ago, I am now free of such constraints. A first visit to Africa is now a real possibility. Nevertheless, there are limitations on my free time and the remaining savings available for making all these visits. Besides, there are other considerations. Air travel damages our already damaged atmosphere and I shall already be flying out to Greece with my daughter and grandchildren for a family holiday in Crete in August. One bad carbon footprint example per year is already one too many. Perhaps I need to find a more eco-friendly way of visiting Africa. It is a good job I now have plenty of free time to search for a sustainable solution.

For fifty years I have not travelled by plane. For the first twenty years, with a young family, we didn't have enough money to fly anyway. Later, as Christine's illnesses eventually prevented her from leaving the house at all for over thirty years, worldwide travel became completely out of the question for me, even to visit our son's grave in Gambia. Since Christine's death in January 2018, I now have the chance to go to places that, before, I could only dream of visiting.

It is a privilege that I want to exercise only with some discernment. Is it possible to travel by boat or train rather than by plane? I have only this one plane trip planned for this year. We shall be staying in a villa in western Crete. It will be the first time the five of us – my daughter Helen, my grandchildren Rosa (20) Sophia (18) and David (12) plus me – have been able to have a holiday together. And despite my misgivings about the bad example set by any air travel, I am really looking forward to a wonderful holiday!

I shall be travelling again by air next year, but this time only with Helen. We shall be visiting Philip's grave on the cliffs near Banjul, where he drowned in 1990 at the age of 21. I am expecting that will be my first visit to Africa, and for both of us, it will be a powerful experience. I hope we shall find it helps us come to terms with our loss.

THE BETHESDA JOYLAND CENTRE SCHOOL FOR ORPHANED CHILDREN, KENYA

Following my two knee replacement operations in 2018, I thought I may well be fit enough to travel to Africa in the second half of this year. People in Homa Bay want me to visit them and I am very keen to see for myself the new school on Mfangano Island that I have been able to fund towards completion, hopefully later this year.

WWCP LINK IN ZAMBIA

There are people in Zambia who also want me to visit them as a matter of urgency. I have been working with them online as World Wide Connection Project (WWCP) partners since 2009, when southern Cambridgeshire was randomly allocated the part of Lusaka that lies to the west of the railway as our WWCP partner area. There are so many projects we have developed there that I want to see for myself. These include vocational training for young mothers, the health and nutrition of children, community development, pig rearing, youth empowerment through sport, conservational use of land, school improvements and sinking a borehole. I also want to meet the street children working at the gymnasium that has been the focus of our most recent fundraising efforts and to see for myself the transformation of their ablution facilities. Last November we arranged for Ian Honeywood, a well-known local boxing personality, to work with the young men and women at the Exodus Boxing Academy and his visit was a huge success. Ian wants to visit again in the next year or two and is hoping I might accompany him this time.

THE BUTTERFLY PROJECT IN UGANDA & ONLINE CHATS

I should also like to visit Uganda, where I have more online friends than in any other country. Among these, in Kampala, is my friend Ben Parkinson, from Birmingham, who, for the past twelve years, has been using his Butterfly Project to train young social entrepreneurs so they can become changemakers in their own communities. Recently, I have played only a minor role in this project, but I still retain a great interest in it. Some of Ben's past trainees have begun participating in a monthly online typed conversation (a chat) that I started on Facebook a year ago, that I call my UGZAMS group. It contains members from different parts of Uganda, Zambia and Somalia. Hence the group title.

I modelled this online chat on a similar one I started in 2016 which is known as the Kenya group and has a Facebook page called WWCP Kenya. Both conversations were set up to facilitate contacts with people in each member's WWCP partner area. The groups have also been used to share skills and experiences and learn from one another. Both groups are ongoing and have exceeded my expectations. I have used them to trial an idea I had called 'Gift-Loans'. The essence of this was to make a gift of a small loan to people who wished to purchase a capital asset from which they might derive a small but steady income stream.

PEACE LOANS

From the Gift-Loan trials, I have now developed a more focused and simplified form of financial assistance called a Peace Loan that I shall hope to promote in the coming year.

PROJECTS IN KENYA

I have strong reasons to want to visit many parts of Kenya. Kitale is a town that I should particularly like to visit. Huntingdon Quaker Meeting has had a link with Quakers in Kitale, lasting over twenty years I believe, that started from visits made there by Hazel Shellens. I worked with Hazel on a project six years ago in which individual Quakers in Huntingdon Meeting saved money by becoming greener and then using the money we saved to plant tropical trees in and around Kitale. That initiative was overseen by an organisation called SGG (Sustainable Global Gardens) and we have confirmed through SGG that over two thousand trees we planted are still there. I am hoping to work again with SGG in Kenya in the future.

In the past, we worked together on empowering a Young Mothers group started in Birunda by Rose Murunga, a Kenyan Quaker from Kitale whom I met online just over five years ago. Beside working together on developing her young mothers and widows project, Rose and I have also worked together in managing the agenda for our online Kenya Group.

For the past couple of years, Rose and I have been planning a programme to foster links between Quaker Meetings in Kenya and elsewhere in the world. Very shortly we hope to launch a trial of this project - called Global Quakers Connecting - that we hope will bring our worldwide family of Quakers closer together. So, of course, I am also hoping to meet Rose face to face before too long!

For similar reasons, I should like to visit people I've worked with who live in Nairobi, Kisumu, Kakamega, Busia and Nanyuki. I should also love to visit the nature reserves near Malindi that Ann Scott and her late husband Bob founded to help safeguard the avian migratory routes to Asia, across Africa and, of course, to western Europe. I had the privilege of helping Ann to raise money at last year's Bird Fair at Rutland Water to purchase more land in eastern Kenya to counter the damage being done by forest clearance by large multi-national companies to grow crops of pineapples that exhaust and ruin the soil in less than four years.

SOUTH AFRICA

I also hope to visit other African countries, especially South Africa, where I should like to visit the headquarters of Breadline Africa in Cape Town to see another long-standing online friend, Edna Titus. We have been in regular touch since 2005, from the time when I first acquired a personal laptop and the year that Christine and I embarked on our first personal Household Savings exercise, as a result of which we raised £400 to donate to Breadline Africa to help convert shipping containers into soup kitchens, pre-schools, libraries etc. Later, in 2008, I collaborated with Breadline Africa in setting up their Cans for Skills project, which was initially funded by £4,600 I was able to raise money among the 'making good things happen' users of community forums like the Omidyar network (o.net) and Ned.com (sadly both now defunct), as well as among the local community in Cambridgeshire.

HOMA BAY

But despite all these other claims, I feel that my most pressing destination must still be Homa Bay County in Kenya, and especially the islands of Mfangano and Rusinga. I have

been privileged to be able to spend a large amount of money on projects here that only a few years ago I could never have dreamed I might get the chance to do.

The first opportunity began early in 2016, when I met Lavender Odida online and discovered that she and her husband Samwel ran a school for orphans on the island of Mfangano. My wife and I decided to choose this school as our “Charity of the year” to help provide some funding through our Household Savings scheme. As we were impressed by the good use to which they put the funding we sent, we extended our support into 2017 and, with Samwel’s help, ensured we helped other worthwhile small projects in the area involving poultry rearing, tree-planting and assisting people with disabilities. Of these, we were particularly impressed by the work being done by a young couple called Donnex and Carolyne Okwiri, who were somehow managing the care of seventeen orphaned children on Rusinga island.

In the past two years, particularly following the sad death of my wife, seventeen months ago, I have been able to find ways of helping Donnex and Carolyne. And they have found ways of helping me too!

DONNEX & HIS DONKEYS

I related in last year’s newsletter how we were able to create an income stream for Donnex and Carolyne and their large family by purchasing a donkey and cart for just £280. By this means they no longer had to buy fresh water from other people’s donkey carts alongside Lake Victoria, but had a means to supply themselves and their neighbours instead. This completely changed their standing in the community and stopped the bullying of their children with disabilities. It gave me the idea of GIFT-LOANS which are now being turned into PEACE LOANS.

PEACE LOANS

With the help of the online Kenya Group, I was able to test the effectiveness of Gift-Loans. I distributed a total of just over £2,000 to seven members of the group who applied for a gift-loan of between Ksh 30,000 (£230) and Ksh 50,000 (£390) to purchase something that could be used to create an income stream. Six of the seven recipients satisfied the requirement that they should use the money to buy agreed items, and then pass on a sum amounting to 110% of the value of the original gift-loan to someone else of their own choice, and ideally to a member of the COSA (Circle of Support And Accountability) they were also to appoint, to oversee the operation and progress of each gift-loan. The one failure was when one of the recipients misused part of the gift-loan to pay for a family funeral. Although this person has continued to increase the remainder of the (much reduced) sum of money, it was rightly criticised by others in the Kenya Group and, it appears, by members of the recipient’s own COSA too.

What the Gift-Loans trials established was that the idea of giving money without any strings attached, other than that it should be seen as a loan to be passed on as a gift to someone else once it had proved to be profitable, was clearly a success. Almost all of the recipients still possessed the material asset that they had purchased with the gift-loan and were continuing to derive a small but useful income stream from it. The less satisfactory aspects

of the trials were that in almost half the cases the initial loan was used first as a commercial loan to others so that the total loan amount could be augmented. I hadn't explicitly forbidden this, but overall my fears were vindicated that this could result in bringing hardship to others who were perhaps already in debt or victims of an addiction. I intend that in all future gift-loan or peace loan schemes, the term "capital asset" will be defined more tightly and any resort to money-lending will be disallowed. Participants found the appointment of a COSA a helpful aspect of gift-loans, but I personally would have liked there to have been more communication from them throughout the process.

I intend to adapt Peace Loans to the findings of the Gift-Loan trials. I am considering specifying a list of approved Peace Loan purchases and also specifying that the loan is to be passed on to someone living at least 30 miles away. This is to prevent a location building up a supply of the same sought-after capital asset in a particular neighbourhood, instead of finding ways that that same capital asset might be shared or used to benefit more people in the community. Overall though I was pleased with Gift-Loan trials and wish to develop an even more effective version of them.



I was sent details of a portable chicken feed processor by a member of the Kenya Group living in Busia, on the Uganda border. For less than £130, this economic petrol-driven tool can produce a bag of chicken feed marketing at 50/- Kenyan shillings for about 39/- Kenyan shillings.

Given that so many people are involved in small scale poultry rearing, this tool could quickly yield a very good return, especially if you are already growing your own maize, cassava and sorghum.

It suggests to me that when I launch the first batch of Peace Loans, it might be a good thing to concentrate on a limited specified range of suitably -approved capital assets rather than leaving the choice entirely up to the recipients themselves.

BACK TO DONNEX AND CAROLYNE

I have been looking for a way of providing better for all the abandoned children that Donnex and Carlyne are looking after. When the floods and hurricanes of last year's storms

washed away the mud walls of the children's house, I funded the purchase of more land on which a rebuilt dwelling could be sited. This plan was undermined when it was discovered that the land that they had purchased was sold to them by the son of the owner of the land, not the owner himself. A local chief was brought in to arbitrate and although he upheld the owner's complaint, he ordered that the land on which the existing dwelling was situated should be protected as long as Donnex and Carolyne were living on the land (they had been squatting, but were now protected). They were also given confirmed rights of access to a small path that leads down to the sizable plot of land they were able to purchase with the returned money (I gave my permission for them to do this). I have now financed the building of 12 basic three-roomed houses on this land for them to let as rental homes. The rent will provide not only for the expenses of their abandoned children but will also enable them to set up a child care service in another part of their land and to stock a small clothes and material shop in a rented plot of land closer to the town of Mbita. World Wide Connection Project Cambridgeshire has agreed to send them two sewing machines, so that they can employ male or female tailors to offer a clothes-making service. The cost of all this to me has been well under £15,000.

THE BETHESDA JOYLAND CENTRE SCHOOL ON MFANGANO ISLAND

All this brings me back to my major project at the present time: building a new school for the orphans in Lavender and Samwel's school. This has been a most exciting development, the main components of which I set down in a letter to the local educational authorities in Mbita. This was my letter:

BETHESDA JOYLAND CENTRE – BJC

The Director

Ministry of Education

Mbita Sub-County

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

My Credentials

I am writing to you to clarify the proposed funding of Bethesda Joyland Centre on Mfangano Island. I am a retired UK citizen living in Cambridgeshire in England. I started my professional career as a secondary school teacher in Swindon in Wiltshire, but I re-trained as a social worker and my main career was as a Probation Officer in Kent, Nottinghamshire and, for the last 26 years of my working life, in Cambridgeshire, where I ended up working for the East of England Probation Training Consortium as a Practice Development Assessor.

I have therefore always had an interest in education and the development and empowerment of disadvantaged individuals. My interest in working with communities in sub-Saharan Africa began around the turn of the century. From 2005 I began work on

creating the World Wide Connection Project to encourage and facilitate links between communities in the richest and poorest parts of the world.

Arising from this project, which has seen a long and successful partnership between my own home area in Cambridgeshire and the western parts of Lusaka in Zambia, I have been keen to develop more friendship partnerships in many other parts of the world. To this end, I began regular online discussions with a group of 14 Kenyans in Nairobi and other areas to the west and north. I had already met Lavender and Samwel Odida online and, with my late wife, had helped to fund projects associated with their Vine Branch Hope orphans school on the plateau at Mfangano Island. Since six of my online discussion group live or have strong links with Homa Bay county, I have been keen to further their various plans.

As a result, I have been trying to build informal non-civic links between people living in Homa Bay and those living in the town of Christchurch and its surrounding area in Dorset on the south coast of England. This is the place randomly assigned by the World Wide Connection Project as the designated partner area for Homa Bay.

Sadly, my wife died last January. This loss has left me determined to continue to assist the work begun by Lavender and Samwel Odida. It has also left me in a stronger position to do so. Since I no longer have to set aside a large portion of our savings as a contingency fund to deal with her many medical problems, I can now plan my future financial commitments much more clearly. I have discussed my plans with my only other close relatives – my daughter and grandchildren – and am pleased to say that they are entirely supportive of my plans to spend money on various projects in Africa in which I have taken a personal interest and in all of which I have come to know the people behind those projects very well.

Our Plans for BJC

When the metal sheeting on the Vine Branch Hope school on the plateau on Mfangano Island was blown away earlier this year, the landowner on whose land the school was sited demanded a 50% increase in the Ksh 6,000 per month rent that Lavender and Samwel were paying. They asked me if I could assist, to keep their school running. I could see that paying an increased rent wouldn't secure the future of the school, as it might simply lead to further increases in the rent. Instead I offered to fund the purchase of a quarter of an acre of land on which the school might be relocated. This was done. BJC has ownership of its own land.

It was at this point that I entered into talks with Keith Lawrence, a friend and neighbour of mine in the village of Buckden, where we both live. We are fellow Trustees of a charitable trust to provide support for residents at the Hardwick Dene Residential home where we have both had close relatives residing in recent years. Keith is a structural engineer, who, with his partner Alan Wilson, a designer, who lives in Glasgow, has developed a very practical way of constructing exceptionally strong buildings around a light framework of interlocking steel. He has offered to work with Samwel Odida in designing a new school for BJC based on the use of his steel frameworks. I have offered to fund the Preliminary Stage and a part, at least, of Stages One and Two of the school building that will follow. Since the scale of the new school will involve expansion both of the number of school buildings and

the school population, I also funded the purchase a further plot of land adjoining my original purchase, bring the total size of the combined land area to almost two-thirds of an acre.

I am hoping to draw support from people in Dorset in helping to fund part of Stage One and Stage Two, but am committed to seeing that a minimum of one dormitory (accommodating 64 children – 32 girls and 32 boys) and at least one Classroom Block comprised of three classes is constructed in the coming year.

I visited Dorset in April this year to find people supportive of developing a link with people in Homa Bay. I made connections with three church groups, including my own fellow Quakers, in the Christchurch/Bournemouth area who I think might also be supportive of this. I also met local scouting groups in Christchurch and the District Commissioner of Christchurch scouts assured me of their interest in sending Explorer scouts to visit and stay with local scouts on Mfangano Island, where Samwel Odida is himself a local District Commissioner.

I am now planning to visit again, probably in February or March 2019, to build upon that initial interest by seeking to find ways people in Christchurch and the adjoining districts might commit to the ongoing funding and support of the school.

The Three Building Stages for constructing the Bethesda Joyland Centre

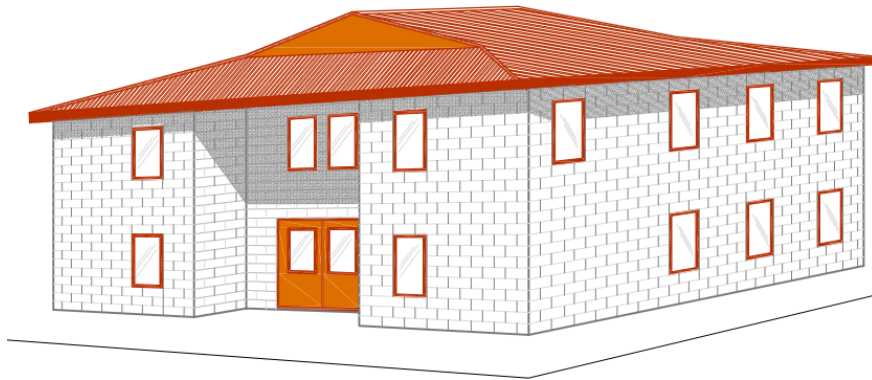
The school is designed in three stages: Preliminary Stage, Stage One and Stage Two.

Preliminary Stage

Keith Lawrence visited Mfangano Island in September and has had the land surveyed and the supply of building supplies confirmed. He has drawn up plans for the Preliminary Stage of building the new school. This consists of plans for the following:

- The basic infrastructure: access route, drainage, water supply, electrical supply, septic tank, foundations and some land clearance all based on a topographical survey of the site conducted in November 2018.
- A security zone for storage of building materials
- A parking area
- Water Tank and storage system
- Boys and Girls Ablution Blocks
- Permanent Admin Block (To be use initially for accommodation and storage needs)
- A Temporary Building (to be used initially for classrooms, but later for cooking and dining facilities)
- Play Areas

The Preliminary Stage should provide a self-sufficient school operation that can function for as long as required, regardless of the timing for building Stage One and Stage Two of the complete school building programme. I have committed to fund all the work required for this Preliminary Stage, to be completed early in 2019.



What the Admin block will look like

Stage One

Stage One provides the first of two permanent Dormitory Buildings each housing 64 pupils.



FRONT ELEVATION

This is what the Dormitory block will look like

The downstairs boys entrance is the door on the left; the girls on the right. The door in the centre leads to the stairs up to two further dormitories upstairs, one for the girls and one for the boys. Samwel Odida has copies of all the ground plans and other design materials for all of the new buildings. I am promising to fund the building of this Dormitory block but I am hoping that part at least will be based on matched funding raised by people in Christchurch, Dorset.

Stage One will also involve the construction of the first of two Classroom blocks, each containing three classrooms. I am again committing to fund the completion of this first Classroom block, again with the hope of partial funding from other sources.



The original plan was for two single storey Classroom blocks, each with three classrooms, but Keith Lawrence has now offered an alternative design in which there would be a two-storey building offering six classrooms. Building that may require some additional funding, beyond that to which I can at present commit. In that case Stage One will only involve a single storey building. It is more likely, however, that I shall find ways to ensure that Stage One includes both the first Dormitory Block and a two-storey Classroom Block with a total of six classrooms.

Stage Two

Stage Two will involve the construction of a second Dormitory that will accommodate a further 64 pupils. It may also involve the construction of more classrooms. If Stage One provided just three classrooms, Stage Two will add a further three classrooms, either by building another single storey classroom building, or, more likely, by extending the existing three classroom block upwards to make it a two-storey building.

A two-storey Classroom Block would leave more open land on the site to the north of the school buildings. This would offer more open space for recreational purposes. On the other hand, a two-storey Classroom Block would also leave room, if future funding were available, for building another six classrooms in a second two-storey Classroom Block on that same site to the north at some time in the future. But if that funding were already available, a second block of six classrooms could become part of Stage Two.

A Summary

I myself am committing to fund from my own resources the Preliminary Stage of the Bethesda Joyland Centre. I am further committing to find the full funding for Stage One of the new school, or if not, to fund it myself.

I shall also endeavour to develop a network of support for the ongoing support of the Bethesda Joyland Centre that shall enable the completion of Stage Two of the building plans. Part of that network of support already exists in a number of sewing groups who are currently making 64 quilts for the first Dormitory block or other accommodation building.

In friendship

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Postscript

Keith's plans for the school have undergone further development in 2019, so that the steel frameworks that have been purchased and will shortly be sent out for the classrooms block will now have double capacity and will constitute 6 classrooms, stepped into the hillside. In addition to some temporary buildings that are already being used as four classrooms (but will be used in future for food preparation and a dining area), the first permanent building is nearing completion. It will eventually be used as an Admin Block, housing staff offices on the ground floor and staff sleeping quarters upstairs. Initially, though, it will be used as a dormitory for up to 64 orphans who are currently sleeping in cramped and temporary accommodation in various smaller buildings.

QUILTS

The New Comrades Quilters group in Cambridgeshire have already completed over 20 quilts for the orphans when they move into a permanent building. At first, that will be the Admin Block whose upper storey panels are being installed and wooden roof beams erected at the present time. Once the building is completed the children will be able to move in. Other sewing groups from around the country have also offered help in making quilts including 13 completed quilts now ready to be collected from Poole in Dorset. Any further offers of help from sewing groups would be very welcome. Please contact Helen Hollington of the NCQ group whose phone number is 01480 456505 or contact Mary Adlam also of the NCQ group whose email address is Mary_Adlam@outlook.com

You will have noticed that I have cut down on photographs in this newsletter to aid successful delivery. I found previously that cut and pasting too pictures made it hard to send. Even so, I shall add two pictures to finish off this edition. The first is a picture of the sewing group in picture in Cambridgeshire and some of the quilts they have made. The

second is of the view of the nature reserve behind my nephew and sister-in-law's home on Guernsey where I recently stayed for almost two idyllic weeks. This provided almost daily views of Marsh Harriers passing food and Spoonbill, Shelduck, Greenshank, Heron, Kestrel, Redshank, Brent Geese etc. in the reedbeds. I shall be going back again in September. Visits in prospect soon to my daughter Helen and my grandchildren in Barnsley as well, in readiness for our August holiday on Crete.

Life is sweet!

David



