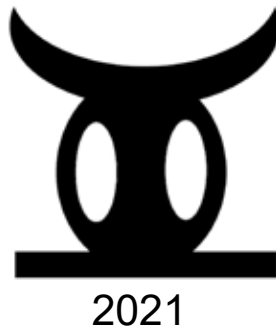


Ghana School Aid



With family permission, this is Jenny Earle's photo of Eric and Auriol Earle (original founders of GSA) attending our 2020 AGM via Zoom. It is with great sadness that we report that Auriol died peacefully at home on April 30, 2021. GSA sends love and sympathy to Eric and all the family. The family hope to arrange a celebration of Auriol's life when possible and asked for donations to GSA in her memory.



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Students at Enyankwaa Primary School in front of the completed new bathroom facilities (see also pp.9-10)



Krabonso Methodist JHS (see also p.21)



Jema D/A JHS (see also p.21)



Akrodie R.C. Primary School (see also p.19)



Akrodie L.A. Basic School (see also p.19)

AGM 2020 REPORT

Held online by Zoom, 25th June 2020

Chair's Report

By Ted Mayne

AKWAABA! In spite of "Lockdown", information technology has enabled us to have our quarterly committee meetings and for the first time ever this AGM, thanks to Zoom.

We have had a testing year, what with the Coronavirus Pandemic and the extensive requests from rural schools in Ghana. I can confirm that, thanks to our representatives on the ground, we have managed to support more projects than ever before. This is because we have received nearly £35,000 in donations from generous donors and legacies.

When I first went to Ghana in 1987, I became conscious of the thousands of children who had received little or no education. 1987 was a hard time for Ghana; there were food shortages and the country was very slowly climbing out of a severe recession. The World Bank was there to lend a helping hand and slowly but surely things improved. It was around this time that Ghana School Aid came into existence and this dedicated team of old Gold Coasters were able to see where the schooling deficiencies lay. Francophone Africa appeared to be so much ahead of the game and Ghana was likely to be left behind. However, things did change and by due diligence and hard work the country has risen from the ashes and moved forward.

There was much to do and very quickly funds were raised to finance education in the rural schools. The grants were only small but our efforts made such a difference to these rural

schools. Over the next 30+ years the charity grew and we were able to finance several major projects. This was an achievement in itself and once our website was built, we were able to "show the world" what we were doing. Originally, we raised £3,000 and this slowly increased, and I am pleased to report that in the 12 months up to 27th March 2020 we raised almost £35,000. This is amazing and our recent newsletter contains up to date information on our achievements so far.

Our fund-raising methods have been revolutionised: gone are the small raffles and small cheques from donors, to be replaced by 4 to 5 figure legacies from individuals who have discovered our existence through the internet. I can report that our hard-working committee keeps the show on the road.

Patrick Heinecke, who now no longer attends our meetings and no longer travels to Ghana, is still active with the Sandema Project. This means that we shall continue to support this project. Patrick has not been to Ghana for two years, but he remains as passionate as ever about the work in the upper regions.

Coronavirus has left much of our work in Ghana in the balance. Most of the schools remain closed, which is not good. So many of them have seen their funds dry up and it will take a long time to restore their finances to their previous level. We are fortunate that we have Kofi Ohene who can manage our funds in Ghana, so our projects can survive.

The GSA committee has been fantastic. Every member has remained on fire for the people of Ghana. I cannot let this report pass without mentioning Jennifer and Anna MacDougall who

produced a marvellous newsletter. I am sure you will agree that it is a true work of art. It is creative and full of articles describing exactly what we have achieved over the past year.

I am sad that we will not be meeting up for our AGM, but I am pleased that we have Zoom to act as a substitute. I hope all will be well for 2021. We have had encouraging comments from one of our longest-standing members, Lalage Bown, who went to West Africa in 1949. She sent glowing comments on our recent newsletter. I spoke to her last week and, at the age of 93, she is as bright as ever. Eric and Auriol Earle [GSA Founders], remain avid supporters. Both are well into their nineties and I have enjoyed visiting them and updating them on our work [please see page 1]. God Bless You All.

Secretary's Report

By Jo Hallett

Ghana School Aid is still a thriving charity! The committee has adapted well to the challenge of the coronavirus epidemic, and, like many organisations, we have been meeting on Zoom. Schools in Ghana have been closed, but many are still in touch with us by email.

We were recently asked to calculate the number of lives impacted by our grants. In a 12-month period, we regularly support projects in 32 schools. At a rough estimate the average number of pupils in a school will be 200 – so that's 6,400 children and adults who benefit in one year!

The wide range of projects supported is reflected in the wonderful 2020 Newsletter. Projects included cement for mud floors, the roofing of classrooms, fitting windows and doors, building a toilet block and, above all, furniture for pupils and staff. The need seems to be infinite! And

we have had a growing number of applications. We decided to limit the timing of requests to an "application window" and to specify the theme, in a bid to make the situation more manageable.

However, this well-intentioned strategy backfired! In October 2019 we had over 60 applications for Water and Sanitation Projects in schools, across Ghana, but sadly few from the northern regions (where access to the internet is limited).

Clearly, we could not help all of them. The applications were sorted on to a large spreadsheet, according to size of school, nature of project, number of pupils and so on. We found (predictably perhaps) that the borehole projects were too expensive for our budget.

We then prioritised the requests from schools in the north, and schools that had not had a grant previously. Finally, we chose the schools asking for the smallest grants in order to impact the largest number of schools. Twenty schools received grants for toilets, urinals, rehabilitation of a well, dustbins and veronica buckets [large bucket with a tap and a bowl for hygienic hand washing invented in Ghana by Veronica Bekoe. See photo of Krabonso Methodist JHS on p.2 and reference in 'Pen to Paper' pp.13-14].

Much as we would like to be providing clean water as well as toilets, this is not within our financial capacity. The next topics for applications are Sanitation Projects and School Furniture. [See up-to-date details on the website: www.ghanaschoolaid.org].

This really is a team effort! Different members of the committee in UK take on different roles, from looking after our finances to keeping us

in the public eye with the GSA website and a Facebook page. In Ghana, Alhassan Salifu Baako is our representative in the north, overseeing a number of schools in and around Tamale, and Kofi Ohene, in Accra, is absolutely key to our distribution of grants to schools. [See reports pp.7-9]. A huge thank you to everyone!

I look forward to another year of the important task of supporting education in Ghana.

Treasurer's Report

Nigel Dennis spoke to his reports, which had been circulated. The annual accounts (1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020) show that our income for that year was £34,263 and the expenditure was £34,694. The report lists all the 34 projects that received grants. A question was asked about auditing the accounts, and Nigel reassured us that they are audited each year, for the Charity Commission. He had also produced an interesting paper showing the income and expenditure each year from 2013 to date, with an analysis of how much of the income each year had come from legacies. This amount is very variable, ranging from nothing one year to £30k in 2018-2019. Penny thanked Nigel for his hard work all year and the very clear reports he had produced. [See latest accounts on p.25].

GSA Website and Fundraising

Penny Sewell (Website administrator) explained that because the Newsletter was so clear in its reporting of projects completed, and because the Newsletter was already posted on the website, she had not posted up separate reports of projects completed, but had listed schools concerned and asked readers to read the Newsletter for more detail. Penny said that she is always open to suggestions for improving the website. She also talked about a fund-

raising initiative she is engaged in, guided by a professional fund-raiser and sending appeal letters to suitable Charitable Trusts in the UK. Apparently, there are over 9000 such trusts in existence, so we hope very much to receive some grants very soon. [As of May 2021, GSA has received donations of £7,150].

GSA Facebook Page

Rita de Graft (Committee member) was able to report to us on the Ghana School Aid Facebook page which she established a year ago and continues to manage and monitor. She has mostly posted photos of projects that we are involved in and articles related to education in Ghana. There is an opportunity to “boost” the page, for a small cost. The aim is to share what we are doing as widely as possible, and attract supporters. Everyone is encouraged to look at both the GSA website and the Facebook page.

Breakout Rooms

The meeting then broke up into five small groups, located in virtual “breakout rooms”. It was an opportunity to meet and talk with a few other people at the meeting. The chance to talk more informally was appreciated!

Committee Elections

Ted suggested that it would be a useful to create a new post on the committee, a Vice-Chair, and this was agreed. William Spooner is happy for his name to go forward for this role. He will shadow Ted and work alongside him. Sue Hewlett has stood down from the committee. We thank her for her long commitment and support to GSA. The office holders were all elected nem con. [The list of office holders, representatives in Ghana and committee members is published on the back page of the Newsletter].

AGM Speakers

Paul Boateng (GSA Patron) said he was glad to be with us – and thanked us for the continuing work of GSA. He had visited Ghana in March, and noted the positive changes in education, such as universal enrolment and free secondary education. In contrast, he was forcibly struck by the overall underfunding of education and the neglect of the northern regions.

With reference to the pandemic, he felt that the public health system is remarkably well organised and well-funded; the hospitals are not overwhelmed and an effective testing system is in place. However, Ghana does not have the economic underpinning of countries like the UK – sound nutrition and sanitation, for instance. He stressed the importance of clean water supplies for all, and is happy that we are providing some small help with this.

He finished by assuring us that “the Ghana you all love remains”!

Kofi Ohene (GSA Representative in Accra) told us of his long association with Ghana School Aid, going back to 1986. He now has a pivotal role in the distribution of grants to schools and projects. The money is paid into his bank account in London and he then transfers it to Ghana and passes it on to the schools. He has to be in touch with the representative of each school, and to iron out the frequent glitches in the system. Kofi visits schools in the south from time to time to assess the proposals or to report on the completion of the work. He also enjoys greeting members of the committee when they visit Ghana. [See his report on pp.7-9].

Reginald Quartey, now working back in Ghana for the Curriculum Development department of Ghana Education Service, said he was pleased to hear of the work of GSA. He is aware of the particular challenges of schools in the north. In relation to the pandemic, he said that some secondary pupils are back in school already, but primary schools were preparing for a return in September.

Jane Scott, Chair of the Wulugu Project (a charity in North Ghana tackling poverty through education), gave a brief report with slides of the work carried out in the last year. The village school at Sankumpe had been repaired and strengthened with the cracked wall rebuilt and the old wooden doors and concrete windows replaced with steel. They let in much more light for the classes when open and were very robust after school to keep intruders, 2 footed or 4 footed, out. The whole school was repainted. The staff welcomed the better working conditions and one had written a most appreciative letter. Pupil attendance was much improved.

Wulugu also built a school at Desiga to replace a Dutch Barn structure, built by the community as their school and shared with the goats in the evening. The children and goats are happy with the new arrangement. It was hoped to repair a very derelict mud lump village school at Boakado, but this was not a popular choice for funders so that will be delayed. A grant application for a new village school at Guomo, well north of Tamale, has been granted, after long delay, so building will start there, after the rains stop. The present School at Guomo is held outside with one room in a Convent so the staff, parents and pupils have been begging for help for a long time.

UPDATES ON THE PANDEMIC IN GHANA

Report from Our Representative in Tamale, Alhassan Salifu Baako

February 2021

Baako became involved with GSA in 2009, through contact with Sue Hewlett (former Committee member). He is Headteacher of a JHS school in Tamale. He frequently visits schools in the Northern region, supports them to make applications for grants, and makes follow-up visits on our behalf. He reports:

Briefly, some of the devastating effects on education are that some children are not willing to go back to school after staying away for ten months. Some have already gone into learning a trade and they have made up their minds to continue with the work they are learning. Others have relocated to the urban areas in search of greener pastures like becoming head-porters in the cities and making new discoveries. Here I am talking about those in the JHS and SHS. Some of the girls too are likely to be pregnant as a result of which may lead them to early marriage. Besides that children who are not given proper care at home may end up falling into bad companies and picking up bad habits like drug abuse among other vices, and a lot might have forgotten what they learned about a year ago.

Head teachers in the Sagnarigu Municipality met on 12th January [2021] with the incoming Director Mr Alhassan Alidu Jnr who advises that we need to be patient with the children when they return to school. He made it known to us that in preparation to reopening schools there would be another disinfection of schools,

PPEs would be supplied to school and we should do well to observe all the covid-19 protocols including social distancing in class. He also encouraged us to embark on a back to school campaign due to the anticipated challenges mentioned above. In this case we need to talk to community leaders on the need to encourage their children to return to school. The Director added that the KG and primary will have 3 terms in the academic year while JHS will run the semester system where a semester will run for six months from January to June then break and return in July till December. However there would be mid terms in between.

The pandemic has hit families hard as some parents have lost their jobs due to cut down on number of employees in some organizations. Traders lost their capital due to very low patronage of their items and the lack of getting new supplies. Others don't stay long at their work places and it has resulted in earning low incomes. This has brought untold hardships to some families.

Curbing the spread of Covid 19 in schools. Report by Kofi Ohene, GSA Representative, Accra

February 2021

In March 2020, following the outbreak of Covid 19 in Ghana schools were closed from March 16, 2020. Protocols (hand washing, wearing face masks, social distancing) were introduced as measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic in the country. Land, sea borders and airports were closed; social gatherings were banned. Temporary partial Lockdown was introduced in cities identified as hot spots for the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic.

In September 2020, the Government announced easing of restrictions on education in response to the low level of cases on Covid 19. The statistics on Ghana as at September 9, 2020 were as follows: Cases: 45,188; Recovered: 44,042; Deaths: 283. A scheme was introduced for phased return in batches to schools for revision, examination and completion of 2019/20 academic calendar.

On 3rd January 2021, the Government in an address to the nation reported on the level of cases on Covid 19 as follows: Total Cases: 55,220, Active cases: 879; Recoveries: 54,005; Deaths: 336. On the basis of scientific advice and stakeholder consultations, all schools were to reopen from 15 January 2021.

The Ghana Education Service produced Guidelines aimed at curbing the spread of the pandemic when schools reopen. These included - fumigation/disinfection of schools; change of academic calendar to January – December, SHS to adopt a semester system; small class sizes (25/30); a shift system; reduction of school hours to 4 hours (8am to 12noon) for primary schools; a School Health Programme - sick bays in schools and mapping of schools to health facilities in Districts were re-enforced; PPEs (Face Masks, Veronica Buckets [see photo p.14], liquid soap, tissue paper, hand sanitizers) were provided to schools for use by teachers and pupils. Workshops on adherence to the protocols were organised for teachers. A National School Inspection Authority was tasked to visit schools to ensure strict compliance with the new measures introduced to curb the spread of the pandemic in schools. In addition to face-to-face teaching, schools were advised to continue the use of online, TV and radio for teaching and learning.

Schools throughout the country reopened from Monday 18 January 2021. Out of anxiety about security, some parents did not send their children to schools during the first two weeks. The 10 months long closure, (March 2020 to January 2021), seems to have affected sustained interest in school attendance; it was noted that some pupils were not keen to return to school, older children who had engaged themselves in some trading businesses were not eager to return to school, while some girls might not be able to return to school due to pregnancy.

Recent reports indicate a surge in cases in Ghana and detection of three new variants (similar to variants found in UK, South Africa and Brazil). Latest number of cases total: 72,328; recovered: 65,149; new cases:1560; and deaths: 472 (08 February 2021).

Isolated cases have been reported in some schools. A private school in Akosombo has reported of 79 cases, including 74 students and 5 staff. The Ministry of Education and Ghana Health Service in collaboration with schools are conducting an exercise based on the 3Ts, Testing, Tracing and Treatment. It is reported that Covid 19 cases are now found in all the 16 Regions, with hot spots in Greater Accra, Ashanti, Eastern and Western Regions, mostly in the large cities.

The Government has re-introduced more restrictions - closure of borders; a ban on large social gatherings - private burials, parties after weddings, and events should be limited to 25 persons. Protocols against the spread of the pandemic, (social distancing, wearing of face masks, hand washing) to be strictly enforced by the Police.

The surge in the level of Covid 19 cases may have been caused by a number of factors including the easing of restrictions, some public disbelief about the existence and spread of the pandemic, the general traditional Ghanaian way of life, including large gatherings at funerals, social events, organisation of markets, general laxity and non-compliance in observing the protocols on Covid 19 and inadequate health facilities, particularly intensive care units (ICUs). Large gatherings before, during and after the general elections held in December 2020, other social events and funerals might have also been contributing factors in the recent surge in the level of Covid 19 pandemic.

There appears to be some mixed reactions among stakeholders on the continuous reopening or closure of schools in the light of the recent detection of new variants and surge in the spread of Covid 19, and issues on efficacy and acceptance of vaccines for prevention of spread of Covid 19 pandemic. The Government is considering ordering of 19.5 million doses of vaccines with a view to containing the spread of the pandemic.

[Ghana was the first country to receive free coronavirus vaccines through the Covax vaccine-sharing initiative organised through the WHO. 600,000 doses arrived in Accra on Feb 24th].



NEWS

Hungerford Rotary Club provides an important amenity for Enyankwaa Primary School

Following a talk given to Hungerford Rotary Club by our committee member Kate Regan, the Club generously gave GSA a grant of £1000. This was used to provide much needed bathrooms for a school in the Central Region of Ghana. The school has 105 pupils (ranging in age from 2 to 13) and six teachers, one of whom, Peter Mensah, sent a grant application. The school had inadequate furniture, poor infrastructure and no toilet facilities. He described the school as serving five small villages of peasant farmers with a high rate of unemployment. However, he wrote that *“the communal and voluntary spirit of the peoples is very high... supporting any developmental project with much enthusiasm.”*

Peter Mensah described the deplorable situation for children and staff which was clearly having an adverse effect on the academic life of the school:

“Teachers and students have to walk a distance to access [a] toilet in the community. The community toilet too is in a deplorable state but teachers and students have no other alternative than to use it. Apart from the distance and poor state of the toilet, teachers and students join a long queue to have their turn. The repercussions are very bad. Contact hours are been lost and wasted as a result of the distance where the facility is sited. This has led to a decline in academic work... Sometimes, some of the students who want to avoid the distance and the queue use the bushes surrounding the school as a place of convenience. Children in kindergarten and class one to two sometimes hide themselves

at the back of the school building to ease themselves.”

Mr Mensah continues:

“The provision of the facility will help address the outbreak of diseases, bring absenteeism to a halt, promote academic work and also improve sanitation in the school community. Girl child education will also be enhanced as girls who are in their menstruation will use the facility as washroom.” [Many Ghanaian school girls frequently miss school due to a lack of facilities].



Top: Community toilet at Enyankwaa
Above: Completed new building (see also p.2)

The grant application was detailed and lengthy and explained that the school had a management committee representing staff and parents to coordinate the project using community labour. The new bathroom facility was successfully completed in only nine months and we received many photos showing the new building. The school community is very grateful:

“The facility is now commissioned and is in use. Our appreciation and gratitude knows no boundary because you heard our cry when we called for help. Our thanks also goes to the Rotary Club of Hungerford for their thoughtful financial aid towards the completion of the project.

On behalf of the staff, pupils, school management committee and the entire beneficiary community, we say a big thank you for coming our aid and we pray that the good Lord keep you and grant you long life coupled with good health to keep doing more for humanity especially Ghanaian schools.

Thank you. Peter Mensah”

Donation to Tamale Senior High School (TAMASCO)

In 2019 a generous bequest from Karola and Claire Strong was made to this government secondary school in memory of Ken Strong who had taught there. After an initial delay, a change of Headteacher and many visits from our representative Baako, a desperately needed girls’ washroom is now nearing completion. Baako has sent several reports and photos of the building progress:

October 2020

“The project is sited close to the eastern gate of the school where a number of classrooms and Girls’ Dormitories are located. At the site you could see the foundations well laid and filled with gravel preparing to cast the concrete for the 10-seater toilet facility. By the count of iron rods fixed, the pillars are going to be 20 in number. A good number of blocks were

also moulded with the pipes ready to be laid. A standpipe was provided close to the site by the contractor to have access to water for the work. After the inspection we went back to the headmaster for another short meeting. The headmaster told me they have started and hope to finish it as early as their efforts could allow, except that they cannot go on with the work at a speed we may want, but they will continue to mobilize themselves towards the project and we should also bear with them.

I told him that I was glad to see the work being started and hope with him in the driving seat he will give it all the necessary attention it deserves to get it completed. I also mentioned the accident the donor [Mrs Strong] had some months back and sustained serious injuries at her age. We pray she lives to see the project she has funded. It is my hope that she will derive satisfaction from seeing the progress of the work from time to time”.



TAMASCO blocks ready to be laid, October 2020

November 2020

“Yesterday I paid an unofficial visit to Tamasco to see the progress of work in order to update you. Therefore I have not been to the headmaster and assistant. My purpose was just to see the level at which the project had gotten to and yesterday the pictures posed show the

current state of work on the washroom. I will continue to be visiting there intermittently to see the progress of work without necessarily going to the school authorities if there are no serious issues to be discussed. Where I find it necessary to see them or when you authorize me to meet them for any formal discussion I will not hesitate to do so.”



TAMASCO construction underway, November 2020

January 2021

“I have visited the project at Tamasco today and took some snaps. It is now roofed. I haven’t been to the headmaster’s office as I did not want to pay a surprise visit moreover as schools are yet to reopen he was likely not to be in office at that time.”



TAMASCO Roof complete, January 2021

Did I exploit children? Do I exploit children? An embarrassing Christmas present

By Margaret Turner [former GSA Committee Member]

Between 1955 and 1959, I taught in a girls boarding school in the Gold Coast/Ghana. The country became independent in 1957 when the Gold Coast became Ghana. Its main sources of income were gold mined in the Ashanti gold mines and cocoa.

The girls were privileged; they were aware of it and worked hard to justify their selection to attend one of the few schools offering secondary education. Some of them had come from remote villages; they may have spent a couple of days travelling in lorries to get here. They were doubly selected, by passing an entrance examination, and by having fees paid either by parents if they could afford it or by villagers who together supported the girl.

But there were plenty of children in the small town where the school was located who did not get any school education although there were several primary schools. Small fees had to be paid monthly and parents could not afford to pay. Young boys (not girls) aged about nine would offer their services as garden boys to earn the money. One boy who watered my garden after school had left his village and come to stay with a relative so that he could get to school. He was sometimes forgetful about my garden but was assiduous at the end of the month when school fees were due. That was sixty years ago.

The United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, which was subsequently ratified by 193 countries. Article

32 of the convention addressed child labour, as follows: “...*Parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development*”.

Under Article 1 of the 1990 Convention, a child is defined as “...*every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, a majority is attained earlier*.” Article 28 of this Convention requires States to “*make primary education compulsory and available free to all*.”

But recognising a “right” does not mean that this article is honoured.

A report from Wikipedia ‘**Child labour in cocoa production**’: “*Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana, together, produce nearly 60% of the world’s cocoa each year. During the 2018/19 cocoa-growing season, research ... found that 1.48 million children are engaged in hazardous work on cocoa farms including working with sharp tools and agricultural chemicals and carrying heavy loads.*”

And this from another article from Wikipedia on Cocoa Production: “*With some two million children involved in the farming of cocoa in West Africa, primarily Ghana and Ivory Coast, child slavery and trafficking were major concerns in 2018. However, international attempts to improve conditions for children were failing because of persistent poverty, absence of schools, increasing world cocoa demand, more intensive farming of cocoa, and continued exploitation of child labor.*”



Boy rakes cocoa beans on a drying rack.
Credit: International Labor Rights Fund / Flickr

What happens to the cocoa?

In 2019, Nestlé announced that they couldn't guarantee that their chocolate products were free from child slave labour, as they could trace only 49% of their purchasing back to the farm level. The Washington Post noted that the commitment taken in 2001 to eradicate such practices within four years had not been kept, neither at the due deadline of 2005, nor within the revised deadlines of 2008 and 2010, and that the result was not likely to be achieved for 2020 either.

For this reason I found it distressing to receive as a Christmas gift a large beautifully packaged box of Nestlé chocolate. **Am I exploiting children if I accept and eat these chocolates?**

Fair Trade chocolate is available on our High Streets. Several Supermarkets have committed to stocking it but you may need to ask. If people stop buying it the shops stop keeping it on their shelves.

Wikipedia: "**Fair trade cocoa** is an agricultural product harvested from a cocoa tree using a certified process which is followed by cocoa farmers, buyers, and chocolate manufacturers, and is designed to create sustainable incomes for farmers and their families. Companies that use fair trade certified cocoa to create products can advertise that they are contributing to social, economic, and environmental sustainability in agriculture".

Pen to Paper Ghana

This is an NGO run by Katie Emerson-Manu and Richard Manu, working with the Ghana Education Service, to improve childrens' education, particularly literacy, in the Kumasi and Mampong area. In 2017 GSA helped to provide a mobile library van for local primary schools [see Newsletter 2018, p.6].

In a recent letter Katie told us:

"Since we run free literacy classes and provide books from the mobile library in schools, we had to be very adaptable when schools shut due to COVID. When we had the lockdown, our focus became on providing relief to those struggling without an income; we focused on donating food packs, hand washing stations and PPE.

Once things started opening again, but with schools still shut, we decided to provide some of our literacy classes to teenagers who were really struggling to read in the villages we work in. We managed to use a church hall to enable the students to socially distance. It was actually a great success as the children really wanted to get back to a routine and start learning again. We were also able to provide books to a few of the children in the villages and visit once a week to swap them. Schools have literally opened up today so we're looking forward to starting our classes again soon."

From the Pen to Paper website:

"As an organisation, we have been obviously affected by the pandemic. Economically, we know some donors are not in a financial position to donate to us at the moment and fundraising events have all had to been

cancelled. It has also affected our day to day running since all schools were shut; we had to quickly shift to working in different ways in order to still make an impact and help those in need.

Pen to Paper Ghana has, in these hard days, raised funds to provide food for families of our students and people in the rural villages that we currently work in. So far, we have distributed **230 food packs** to help families during the lockdown period. We give a massive thanks to all of you who chose to still make others' lives better during these hard times.

For many of the communities that we work in, water is a limited resource with there being as little as one well for the whole village. With the known fact that washing hands can reduce the chances of spreading the virus, we have been able to provide **9 hand washing stations** to different communities to help reduce the spread of Covid-19. Each hand washing station was placed in a busy part of the village, usually by the bus station and with the collaboration of the elders of each village, certain people were put in charge of filling the hand washing station and ensuring the soap we donated was replenished.

When lockdown was lifted in Ghana and the Government eased the restriction of public meetings, certain year groups were allowed to go back to school in order for them to complete their final exams. At the point, we took the opportunity to speak to the chiefs of the villages who kindly allowed us to use large facilities, such as church halls, to **run our free, literacy classes** for teenagers who were still at home. Our main focus was to ensure we were abiding by the social distancing rules, so having a large space was essential. With the generous support

from Fashion-Able Ghana, we **distributed 100 personal protection equipment** to our students and their families. Each bag of PPE consisted of a face mask, a bottle of hand sanitiser and soap.



Veronica bucket (left) and bag with PPE (right)

We also noticed that many of our pupils were coming to the classes hungry, so when Mummy and Me Ghana reached out to see how they could help, we decided that providing breakfast for the students would be the best thing. Before each class, we are now giving a breakfast to each of our pupils, which has **totalled 640 breakfasts** and, it is also helping provide an income to a couple of ladies in each village who are cooking the hearty breakfasts”.

You can read more here - www.pentopaperghana.com/single-post/2020/08/09/covid-19-update



Child with food pack

VISIT TO GHANA

A Brief Report

By Letitia Boateng (GSA Committee Member)

I left the United Kingdom in September 2019 for a six month visit to Ghana. Just at the time of my return in March, the Coronavirus Pandemic broke out, and imposition of rules and travel restrictions by the Ghana Government made travelling difficult, so I came back in October 2020. Visiting some of the schools GSA supports in the Eastern Region was on my “To do” list.

Kwaboanta

In early October, I went to the funeral of a cousin at Kwaboanta. That gave me the opportunity to visit the Kwaboanta DA Junior High School that we support. When I got there, it was very quiet as classes were in progress. A teacher who introduced herself as the assistant head met me and took me to her class. The first thing that caught my eyes was the inscription “*Donated by Ghana School Aid*” on the desks. Seeing the children sitting comfortably at the desks made me feel happy about the work we are doing. She also showed me some football jerseys they bought from a previous grant. It was nice to see them packed neatly in a cupboard. Our conversation was short because I did not want to keep her away from her class. Besides, I had to get back to Abonse before dark, and a car was waiting. We bade farewell to each other as I hurriedly returned to the car.

[See Newsletter 2020, p.14. In January 2021 GSA awarded this school another £280 to complete construction of a toilet block].

Batabi

Both Batabi and Kwasi Awuah, two other schools

I intended visiting, are in the same area near Akim Oda. In order to reduce the number of my travellings, I decided to kill two birds with one stone. My first stop was [Akim] Batabi Presbyterian Primary/KG school.

On arrival, I met the headteacher and the coordinator, and they showed me the office block they had built from a grant from GSA. They asked if we could give them a further grant for plastering and other remaining work. Much as I understood the need to complete the project, I told them about our limited resources and current objective to support only sanitation and toilets. They perfectly understood that they don’t qualify for support at the moment because they have a KVIP toilet which they informed me in conversation, that outsiders sneak in often. Before I left for Kwasi Awuah, the second school to visit that day, I gave them a couple of GSA newsletters.

[See Newsletter 2020, p.12].



Work in progress at Batabi

Kwasi Awuah

When I left Batabi I realized that I could not reach Kings Academy at Kwasi Awuah before schools close. Therefore, I went to Etwereso, a town near Kwasi Awuah village and booked a room at a Guest House for the rest of the day.

Patrick Nyante, one of our GSA representatives, had arranged for the school bus to pick me up

the following morning at 7am, at a place called Camp Junction where the bus collects some pupils. It had also been arranged that Patrick would join me at the junction from Akim Oda, where he would spend the night. I was told at Etwereso that I could catch a bus that would take me to Camp Junction at 6.30am the following day. Full of anticipation, I was ready at 6.20am in the morning waiting for the bus. What I did not know was that I was going to have adventure.

It was 6.45am and the bus had not arrived. Meanwhile motorbikes, popularly called Okada, were passing frequently. I did not see any taxi. My heart started beating fast as I realized I was getting late and therefore my only option would be to go by the Okada. Up to that moment, I had never, in my life, sat on a bicycle, let alone riding on a motorbike. The idea terrifies me, fearing I might fall over. Although I love riding stationary bicycles at the gym, the thought of riding an Okada made me shiver.

A young man standing by told me earlier to take the Okada if I was in a hurry. I took no notice of him and said to myself *"you don't know what you are talking about. I am scared."* Then, I thought about phoning Patrick to kindly ask the driver of the school bus to pick me up from Etwereso. But I dropped the idea because I did not want the children to be late to school. About five minutes later the young man came to me again and said in Pigeon English *"Madam, like you no de take de Okada you no go go o."* He was right. If I don't take the Okada I would be there forever. A few moments later he asked me *"Madam, make I stop de nes one de de come for you?"* Before I answered, another Okada appeared, he beckoned it to stop, and it stopped. Then it dawned on me that there was going to be a problem apart from my phobia. I was wearing a

slit and kaba (a long straight maxi skirt and top) and to mount that motorbike was going to be difficult. My heart beat faster.

As the rider waited for me to get on behind him, I stood there staring at the seat. Then he said *"Mummie, get on and let's go."* *"How do I do that?"* I asked him, smiling to hide my fear and anguish. The young man approached me once more and said *"O ibi your slit madam, make I help you?"* *"Yes please,"* I said pleadingly. Again, he was right, it was my slit, and also the terror of travelling by Okada. He tried to show me how to mount it, but my slit got in the way. The rider was getting impatient. So he asked a passer-by to help, and by the time they helped me get on the seat my maxi skirt was a mini skirt, right up my knees. How embarrassing! Anyway, the rider took off and my helpers waived at me laughing. I waived back and managed another smile as the rider gathered speed.

The slightest bump sent chills down my spine, fearing I was going to fall off. Some few meters down the road, in a curve, we entered a thick fog. *"Slow down! slow down! have you put on the light?"* I shouted. *"Don't worry Mummie, this is my fourth trip, you are safe,"* he replied and continued in the same speed. Stiff and terrified at the back, I tried a conversation to ease my tension. So I asked him if the weather was like that every morning and told him that I had passed that way the previous afternoon. He replied that it had been foggy for the past three days and added that it was worse that morning. So I asked him why he was not slowing down if the fog was thicker than the day before. All of a sudden he slowed down and stopped abruptly. I gave a sigh of relief thinking my message had sank in at long last. At the same time, I was wondering why he stopped. He started reversing

and said apologetically that we passed the junction a few meters back. All I could do was to thank God profusely from the bottom of my heart. He came round to help me descend the bike. The process was not as complicated as before, because I could move my legs better. I paid him and off he went.

Recomposing myself, I remembered that I heard the noise of a tear as the young man struggled to help me get on the motorbike. I checked and it was indeed a tear, about four inches along the hem up my heel. Not too bad, I thought. As I looked up, I was happy and relieved to see Patrick coming towards me. He had arrived about ten minutes earlier.

The bus, more or less a skeleton, arrived a few minutes later with about ten pupils. I was thankful that I wasn't late after all. It was easy to get on the bus without assistance. As I took my seat, I said hello to the lovely children on board, and they replied back in loud delightful voices. On the way to Kwasi Awuah the bus stopped at four villages to collect children smartly dressed in their school uniforms. I noticed that as they boarded the bus, either a child or a parent put a piece of wood on the floor at the back of the bus, and I wondered why. Patrick had been to the school before, so he explained to me that they were firewood for the caterer. I thought it was a very good practice that could save the school some money.

Arriving at the school, a two-classroom block funded by GSA was prominent. Although it was not completed, I was pleased to see classes being held there, clearly far better and safer than their old, dilapidated shed. GSA had earlier provided desks, and I am trying to help with doors and windows. The second thing I noticed was their

toilet right in the middle of the compound. It was a naked health hazard to the children and teachers as well. The Headteacher told me and Patrick that Sanitary Inspectors had asked them to demolish it, failure of which would incur a heavy fine. Just before I left Ghana, I heard that rain and wind had done the job. Fortunately, at a committee meeting held in January this year, GSA allocated funds [£1089] for a KVIP toilet. Considering the circumstances, I am sure they will be overwhelmed with joy when the money reaches them.



Kings Academy's classroom block in progress

Kings Academy is situated at a vantage point, serving a catchment of four other villages. It comprises a creche, kindergarten and primary 1 to 6. At a PTA meeting that coincided with my visit, parents and teachers expressed their gratitude to GSA for all the support given them. Some parent artisans promised to use their skills to help, should we consider the school again for a future grant.

I returned to Abonse pleased that, despite the unpleasant experiences, I was able to make the trip.

UPDATE ON PROJECTS

Urgent need for toilet facilities in schools

Our secretary, Jo, did a lot of research into the need for sanitation and toilet facilities in Ghanaian schools. We also received help from our representatives in Ghana including this explanation from Baako in Tamale, regarding the lack of facilities in many schools and the issue of urinals vs toilets:

“As we know whereas the toilet serves dual purposes the urinal serves one purpose that is just for passing urine but you can see that some schools request for the urinals instead of toilets. Prior to recent times, most schools use public toilets. These were toilets built and cared for by the District Assemblies in the communities and the schools shared with the members of the communities, and usually what they needed were only the urinals in their schools to meet their immediate needs. These toilets were the KVIP type and not WC type. Some schools walk for more than 250 metres to get to the public toilet resulting in pupils staying so long outside the class under the pretext of going to the toilet. Others, because of the smell of the public toilets, they prefer to go into the bush to free themselves which is bad. Based on that some NGOs and the Assemblies saw the need to put up toilets (KVIP) in some selected schools which was very good for the schools, but in some cases due to lack of regular cleaning of the facility, where there is a toilet and a separate urinal people prefer using the urinals to urinate instead of going into the toilet to avoid the smell and the mess in there unless it has become necessary for them to use the toilet. Traditionally that was how the whole thing started. It was very common to see

people building houses, yet you will not find them creating toilets in them but bathrooms where they urinate and take their bath.... they see that spending to put up a toilet in the house is expensive and for that matter a luxury meant for the rich and not a basic need or necessity.... the Central government realized the harm and through the Assemblies started encouraging people to provide toilets in their houses to promote good sanitation practice and personal hygiene. Otherwise they see the two (toilet and urinal or bathroom) to be separate things altogether. Now the awareness on the need to have good toilets in the schools is there and they need them, but they see that it is expensive to provide them and for that matter putting in efforts to at least have good urinals for school use.

You also asked whether the urinals are for the use of both boys and girls. Yes both of them use them but in different chambers. Usually it is built quite wide and partitioned with a wall in-between making them separate places with different entrances for boys and girls then the teachers would also have theirs separate.”

As described by our Secretary Jo Hallett in her report to the AGM on p.4, we received over 60 requests from schools for toilets and sanitation projects during the application window in October 2019. We received another 70 applications in 2020! Every single one showed a high level of need; some schools had really dire situations. We have photographic evidence of truly terrible sanitary conditions. These adversely affect both the health and academic life of children and staff. Absenteeism due to lack of facilities is frequently mentioned, particularly in the case of girls. Unfortunately GSA does not have the funds to help them all. Some request expensive bore holes

to access fresh water. In order to prioritise as fairly as possible, reflecting GSA's stated priorities, rural schools mainly from the northern and central regions and girls' schools were identified. A selection of these funded projects is described below.

Akrodie Local Authority Basic School and Akrodie Roman Catholic School, Ahafo

These two schools, serving a poor farming community in the new region of Ahafo in the west of Ghana, received grants to improve their toilet facilities in early 2020 and completed their new toilet blocks a few months later. As the photos and letters of thanks show, these were much needed.



Completed building at Akrodie L.A. (see also p.2)

Francis Attah Yeaboah, Headteacher of **Akrodie LA Basic School**, (420 children and staff) explained the situation:

“The specific reasons for this our urgent application is that, the school has no toilet facility and for that matter both the pupils and staff have to walk far to the community toilet to ease ourselves. Because [of] that, it makes the pupils insecure to walk that far distance to the community toilet and even crossing the road. Some pupils take advantage of that and run

to their homes without coming back to school and this affects their academic performance. The teachers too waste instructional hours by walking far to the community toilet and some do not even come back to teach again and leads to ineffective teaching and learning. Our kg pupils are more especially affected because they cannot be left alone to visit the community toilet hence they have to be taken to the toilet by the teachers and this... also affects teaching and learning because....the community toilet is far.”

Akrodie Roman Catholic Primary School has 480 pupils from 6 to 14 years old and 22 staff, but no toilet or handwashing facilities, which the application stresses, causes poor hygiene and sickness. GSA awarded a grant in February 2020 and by August we received photos and thanks from Owusu Ahmad Dankwa: *“This day is indeed a happy day to me because GSA has provided my school with urinal facility*



Pupil outside the completed toilet facilities at Akrodie R.C. (see also p.2)

for my school. All the school community and the entire Akrodie community are very thankful to GSA for such a great support of providing such a wonderful and beautiful project like this to our wards.....The pupils will clean the urinal rooms regularly under the strict supervision... We are again thankful to GSA. God bless you all especially madam Jo and Mr. Ohene. Thank you."

Owabi D/A Primary School and JHS, Ashanti

This primary school in the Atwima Nwabiagya District of Ashanti has 518 pupils from 4 to 12 years old and 18 staff. The existing bathroom facilities were dangerous and insufficient to serve the school population. The Headteacher, Beatrice Daako explained that the local community were mainly farmers and traders who could not help the school financially. She applied for a grant to rebuild the toilet block. GSA awarded £1600 for this purpose.

Asene Nuriyah Islamic Basic School, Eastern Region

An initial request from Headteacher Alhassan Mahamudu in October 2019 was to renovate the toilets at this school of 300 pupils and 18 staff. The condition of the facilities was described in detail, including the dangerous state of the building which would disintegrate further in the rainy season. The lack of proper doors meant that snakes were a danger to pupils and staff, and bad smells polluted the environment. An insufficient capitation grant from the Ghana Education Service, as well as little support from the local community made it difficult to carry out renovation projects.

A grant of £1290 was agreed and later a further amount was added to enable new roofing to be provided. The Headteacher wrote in June 2020 and photos were sent of the resulting work completed.



Completed toilet block at Owabi Primary School



Completed blocks at Asene Nuriyah

“These renovated projects by GSA have brightened the school environment which will increase the student population because students will have a comfortable and hygienic places for toileting and urinating. The projects will again improve effective teaching and learning which is our ultimate goal because quality and effective instructional hours would not be wasted anymore now because students will not have excuse to dodge classes.

As headteacher together with my staff, we strictly monitor and supervise regular cleaning and maintenance of these beautiful projects given to us by GSA.”

Krabonso Methodist JHS, Bono East

This school was given a grant of £434 in 2020 to purchase Veronica buckets and bins for hand washing and litter. Nicholas Agama sent photos and a message of thanks.

“These equipment will indeed help the staff, and the students practice good personal hygiene more especially in this period of covid 19 when school resumes. Schools have been closed but the students were around in their school uniforms [to] show great appreciation to GSA. All the equipment will be well maintained to be used for

the intended purpose for a longer period of time. WE ALL SAY GOD BLESS GSA, LONG LIVE GSA. THANK YOU.”



Veronica buckets and bins at Krabonso Methodist JHS (see also p.2)

Jema D/A JHS, Bono East

This school serves a farming area with 121 pupils of 13 to 18 years old and 8 teachers but had no toilet facilities at all. The Headteacher, Elvis Yeboah, applied for help to construct “urinal facilities for the pupils and staff”. GSA awarded £1140 in 2020 for this project which the Head would supervise with voluntary labour from the local community. We received photographs of the smart new blocks a few months later.



Completed blocks at Jema JHS (see also p.2)

Gwira Eshiem Methodist Basic School, Western Region

This school was given £930 initially for a new toilet block, but in the meantime this was completed by the PTA. The Head explained that a serious lack of furniture in the school meant that the youngest children had to sit on blocks or on the floor which made them dirty: *“with the grant, we were able to purchase 70 pieces of plastic chairs and 12 pieces of wooden tables. This has helped the school to furnish the Kindergarten classrooms with chairs and tables and pupils now have comfortable seats to sit on.”*

Kanvilli-Tawfikiya JHS, Tamale

An £870 grant was given to this school to complete the new classroom block [see Newsletter 2018 p.15] with flooring and plastering. Following a request from Baako, the



Top/Above: Work in progress at Kanvilli-Tawfikiya

Headteacher, GSA awarded a grant of £1063 in January 2021 for a toilet block, in particular to meet the needs of female pupils and staff.

Kalpohin Kamaria Islamic Primary School and Kindergarten, near Tamale

In 2020 the Headteacher of this school appealed to our representative, Baako, for help to complete a learning centre. This was to house some IT learning equipment which had been given to the school. Baako wrote to our secretary:

“I write to forward to you the application from Madam Rosina N. Awuni, a Christian by religion and Headteacher of the Kalpohin Kamaria Islamic Primary/ KG School under the Sagnarigu Municipal Education Management who have planned to build a Learning Centre in the school for some time now but could not. I



Top/Above: Kalpohin Kamaria Learning Centre

received her application letter on the 9th April and visited the school on the 11th April to have a discussion with them and to see things for myself about the school.

She told me that due to the lack of the Learning Centre they are not making maximum use of the learning equipment they have. She took me round the school to show me the 840 cement blocks they have and the spot they want the learning centre to be built. She says the PTA has agreed to contribute their quota by providing labour and bearing the cost for workmanship. She has also promised me that together with her teachers they will give all the necessary attention the work will need if their application is given approval by GSA”.

The Committee awarded £500 to enable the roof to be added and the building completed.

Hamile TI Primary School, Upper West

This school of 380 pupils from age 2 to 13, and 7 teachers, serves a small rural community of peasant farmers, has no toilet facilities. The Headteacher, Aawona Felix, sent a detailed and graphic description of the conditions endured by the children. A survey of their sanitation needs was conducted revealing that many of the children suffered from “*cholera related diseases which required urgent intervention. Besides, both teachers and pupils depend on the public latrines which have been in serious deterioration for decades and also very far from the perimeters of the school.*”

Absenteeism and early dropout from school is a common problem, especially among girls and female teachers, as well as obvious issues for the youngest children. The Head explained that



Hamile TI's completed toilet block

the construction of 3 toilets with hand-washing facilities would improve the health and sanitation of the school population as well as leading to: “*higher pupils’ and girls’ enrolment, retention and academic success rate; girls will feel more confident, stay the necessary years in school...; improvement of the academic performances of the pupils; and improvement of pupils’ self-esteem and well-being... The implementation of the project will therefore effectively contribute to the fight against one of the structural causes of poverty in the community that, in this case, is the low education rate.*”

This school received £1140 in 2020 and sent photos of the completed building.

Adukrom Asuogya Basic School, Central Region

Many schools encountered delays in construction of their projects, due to severe weather conditions as well as the problems engendered by the pandemic. Bright Amoah has sent progress reports on the toilet block funded by GSA in 2020. In September she wrote:

“Work on the toilet facility in Adukrom Asuogya Basic School has started despite the Covid-19.

A three seater hole has been dug and the blocks have been moulded. The incessant rains that set in during the rainy season has slowed down the construction of the project. The Covid-19 restrictions also contributed for the delay as most of the people especially the artisans were adhering to the safety protocols. But thank God life is returning to normalcy....the masons and the carpenters have been contacted and work on the project will commence as early as possible."

In March 2021:

"I'm glad to update you once again about the progress of the toilet facility. As depicted in the photographs the construction of the toilet has begun as laying of the blocks has reached the lintel stage. The mason will soon fix the door frames and also begun with the plastering of the facility. Other items like paint for painting, door to fix the facility are all ready as we look forward to complete the facility as soon as possible. Will keep updating you on regular basis as the project moves from one stage to another".



Toilet facility underway at Adukrom Asuogya

Edumanu M/A Primary School, Central Region

This school was sent a grant of £930 to construct three toilets for pupils and staff in 2020. There were a number of delays but by January 2021 they had made good progress according to Ayaim Michael:

"Inaccessibility is a barrier to frequent communication hence our inability to update you regularly. Kindly accept our sincere apology for not updating you in due course. However, there is a speedy work ongoing in the construction work. Covid-19, and the rainy season has slowed down the construction but the effective supervision of the headmaster, myself and the school leaders coupled with the people's commitment and the communal spirit of the community have seen the work going on smoothly despite the above mentioned challenge. Also the progress of the project was stopped due to the death of the chief of the town. Everything has been done now and the project will be completed soon looking at the power, the zeal and the spirit of commitment of the workers. I will therefore update you on the progress of work from time to time till it is completed."



Construction in progress at Edumanu

TREASURER'S ANNUAL REPORT 01/04/2020 - 26/03/2021

by Nigel Dennis, Treasurer

INCOME	£
Regular Donations	3,685.00
The Morel Trust	500.00
The Chapter of the Order of the Holy Paraclete, Whitby	200.00
Emerging Business Intelligence & Innovation Group Limited	1,000.00
Cauda Trust	250.00
Donation for Let's Read Laptop Library	200.00
Hungerford Rotary Club	1,100.00
The Ekumfi Trust	2,237.13
Donation in Memory of Evan and Eirwen Lewis	5,000.00
Rainford Trust	1,000.00
Christadelphian Samaritan Fund	400.00
Pat Newman Memorial Trust	500.00
The Canning Trust	1,500.00
Walter Watson Charitable Trust	2,500.00
Ward Family Charitable Trust	1,000.00
Donations through Just Giving	73.07
Donations through PayPal Giving Fund	700.67
Donations through Virgin Money Giving	1,000.00
Donations through Everyclick	16.50
Donations through Giving.com	16.03
Annual Lunch Bookings and Donations 2020	307.00
Refund of St. Mary's Islington booking fee for annual lunch	205.00
HMRC Gift Aid	403.03
Interest from COIF Deposit Fund	15.19
TOTAL INCOME	<u>23,808.62</u>

EXPENDITURE	£
Grants to projects in Ghana	26,602.00
Fundraising	469.64
Expenses of Officers in Ghana	350.00
Annual Lunch and AGM 2020	120.20
Newsletter May 2020	589.00
Bank Transfer Fees	8.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	<u>28,138.84</u>

FUNDS at 26th March 2021	£	£
NatWest Current Account Balance 1st April 2020	2,026.99	
COIF Deposit Account Balance 1st April 2020	<u>17,000.00</u>	19,026.99
Deduct Expenditure less Income £28,138.84 - £23,808.62 =		<u>4,330.22</u>
TOTAL Balance at 26th March 2021		<u>14,696.77</u>

Nat West Current Account Balance 26th March 2021	13,696.77
COIF Deposit Account Balance 26th March 2021	<u>1,000.00</u>
TOTAL	<u>14,696.77</u>

GRAND TOTALS 1986 – 26th March 2021	INCOME (£)	EXPENDITURE (£)
1986 – 31st March 2020	364,994.12	345,967.13
1st April 2020 – 26th March 2021	<u>23,808.62</u>	<u>28,138.84</u>
Total	<u>388,802.74</u>	<u>374,105.97</u>

Income less Expenditure	£388,802.74 - £374,105.97 =	£14,696.77
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REVIEW

By James Gibbs [*taken from a longer review*]

Alastair Niven, *In Glad or Sorry Hours*.

Starhaven: 2021 ISBN 0-936315-48-2. Available on Amazon and as an ebook: www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0936315482. £15.00.

Niven established a firm reputation in a now conventional area of literary studies - the work of D H Lawrence, but he refused to rest on academic laurels. He has repeatedly engaged with the new. He has, for example, listened to the voices of his generation - and the generations born in the 1930s - from around the world. Initially many of these were African and he has published extensively on African writing: on Achebe – with whom he enjoyed a long friendship, Elechi Amadi, and Jack Mapanje – their sons kicked a foot-ball around together! But he has not confined himself to Africa: supervised by A Norman Jeffares, of whom more below, he completed a wide-ranging PhD thesis at Leeds that meant he had to address fiction not only from Africa but also from the Caribbean and from India! He has published on Nirad C Chaudhuri, Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan and Raja Rao, and he has been involved with those disconcerting, disruptive figures who move confidently around the English-speaking world upsetting people and trailing controversy. That is to say he has, in various ways and ‘in real time’, engaged with both V.S. Naipaul, dubbed ‘V S Nightfall’ by his fellow West Indian Derek Walcott, and Salman Rushdie, who has been called many and much worse names! Niven has repeatedly moved away from the comfortable and conventional coming to terms with those who have little in common with his South

London upbringing, his British education, his ‘off to Africa’ spirit or his roots in Scottish manses. Towards the end of his final undergraduate year [at the University of Cambridge], Niven found out about the Commonwealth Scholarship scheme for post-graduate work – and after getting a good degree (although he doesn’t mention that!), he applied to do an MA at the University of Ghana. Readers of this publication will be particularly interested in the 12 ½ pages devoted to the three years spent at Legon. On those pages, he refers to politics, more precisely he quotes from a letter written home after the ‘aborted insurrection on 17th April 1967’, and he includes several observations about the theatre in Accra and Legon. He refers to playing Sir Andrew Aguecheek to Paul Danquah’s Feste in an International Drama Group (Accra) production, and he also comments on student productions of work by Joe de Graft. He mentions the British Council-sponsored visits by James Cairncross, Judi Dench and Barbara Jefford.

Niven deftly brings alive members of the Legon community including Alex Kwapong, Alan Nunn May, and his fellow Commonwealth Scholars, Ruth Banfield and Jean Le Guen. It was, however, the English Department that was the centre of his life, and people connected with it are given particular attention. The West African staff during his time included Ime Ikkideh, ‘on occasion’ George Awoonor Williams, and Niven’s thesis supervisor, Dr Kojo Senanu. (Kofi Sey, Tom Kwami and A N Mensah were also there - the memoir is not meant to be comprehensive!) The Head of Department when he arrived was Douglas Duncan, and Duncan gave way, while Niven was there, to M Bryn Davies. The ‘grandee of the Department’ was, we read, Robin Mayhead, who was ‘steeped in the Leavisite mode of critical discourse’, and

the external examiner was A Norman Jeffares, who was known as 'Derry' and, apparently, as 'Professor Fixit...The 'External' was important for Niven, but he was not the most important person connected with the English Department. That distinction went to the most junior member of staff in the Department when he arrived: she was a VSO called Helen Trow and, in due course, she became Mrs Niven.

Niven mentions three of his students in this section of the book: James Kofi Agovi, Joyce Aryee and Chris Asher (Jr). And there is much to be said about each of those remarkable people! Niven is, however, legitimately content to introduce them, point quickly towards areas in which he knew them and in which they moved, and then pass on. *In Glad or Sorry Hours* is a personal document, and the reader relishes the particular, the individual, the personal that the author offers in his well-paced prose. A stylist, Niven sums up his feelings for the West African country that was his introduction to the post-colonial world in a manner that illustrates the overwhelmingly positive tone and the manner of his writing: 'Part of my heart remains in Ghana ... I have occasionally returned. My liking for the people, my admiration for their ancient cultures, and my enjoyment of Ghanaian cuisine never dim.' The Legon years were, as he says and as is apparent from the direction his career took, very important. Perhaps they were more of an initiation than an introduction.

From Ghana, on the advice of Jeffares, Niven undertook a PhD at Leeds, supervised by Jeffares. ...The topic was wide one: a 'comparative study of African, Caribbean and Asian fiction in English focusing on the relationship of the individual to the community.' That is to say, it was dauntingly innovative in

scope and subject. The memorialist spares us the agonies of composition, preferring to set down his observations on Jeffares as a conscientious supervisor and a sometimes distracted head of department.

After a year teaching in the University of Leeds, and by this time married, Niven moved to the (new) University of Stirling. From the memoir, it is clear that Niven's eight 'glorious years' in Scotland were particularly rich in friendships, in the development of new interests and in the racking up of achievements. For example, he established the University's high profile for Commonwealth literary studies. At this point (1978), and because he 'feared being stuck in a groove', Niven made a bold decision and left full-time academia for a job in the voluntary. He took the first of the jobs that make his career profile so distinctive, and that is shown by the letters after his name, his MA and PhD are followed by OBE and LVO [Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order]! There were jobs between posts, detours, add-ons, and 'significant involvements', but, broadly, Niven became the Director General of the Africa Centre in Covent Garden, then the Director of the Literature Section at the Arts Council and then the Director of the British Council, Principal of Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park. He was also President of PEN.

Niven has written about his life with wit, generosity of spirit and *sang froid*, and he has written lightly of dangers that were real.

Ghana School Aid



May 2021



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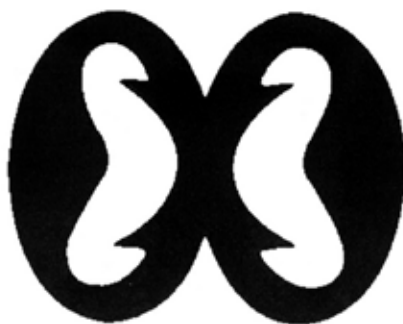
epmayne@globalnet.co.uk

Website:

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2021

The meeting will be held online via Zoom on June 17 2021 at 2 pm. We invite everyone to join in. Please contact our Secretary for details at jo.hallett74@gmail.com



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