



DRUMBEAT

Autumn 2009

In this Issue

The Newsletter of The Friends of The Gambia Association
8 Essex Close, Morden, Surrey, SM4 4NP www.fotga.org.uk

A Registered Charity UK No 1051745 and NGO in The Gambia No. A92

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David Smith handing over FoTGA 2008 Donation to the Brufut run Committee



A group of students happy to be back after the holiday



e-mail:
info@fotga.org.uk



Chairman's message



It is with great pleasure that I write my first message as chairman of the charity. A sponsor and member since 1994, I find I am in a position to become more active in the charity, but did not expect such a high office as a first appointment. The learning curve is steep and I thank the committee for their continual patience in responding to my many questions.

With the rainy season ending and the tourist season about to start we have three main targets:

The refurbishment of Maka Ali Sarr nursery school will start shortly.

An advertising campaign in country to raise our profile with the tourists to recruit new members and sponsors.

A scheme to motivate our sponsored children to improve their educational attainment.

The Brufut Marathon will run on 12th December this year. The theme is the 'Race against Malaria'. We will again be co-sponsoring the event.

OJ (our office manager in the Gambia) has been invited to participate in an emergency response team sponsored by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). He has attended the first training workshop and the report is on the web site for your information.

I have received two requests for medical assistance. Both are deserving cases which cannot be resolved in Gambia so will require overseas treatment. We have a medical fund but we are not in a position to fund them completely. If you could donate I would be most grateful.

Finally, the committee and I thank you for your valuable and continual support in making a difference to the lives of the people of The Gambia.

Andy Beal

An Appeal for Donations

Musa Gomez



Musa is 4 years old and was diagnosed with Hirschsprungs disease as an infant. A colostomy was performed in 2006. The surgical procedure to correct the condition is not available in The Gambia. The Diana, Princess of Wales Children's Hospital in Birmingham has quoted £8500 for the surgical procedure. He will require at least 10 days aftercare and recovery. With flights (including mother) and accommodation we estimate the full cost as £20,000.

Omar Kanuteh

Omar is 35. He fell from his bicycle. X rays reveal complete destruction of the head of his left femur requiring a hip replacement. This procedure cannot be performed in The Gambia but can be undertaken in Dakar (Senegal) at a cost of £2600

If you wish to donate please send the donation to the Treasurer. AB

TELL US YOUR STORY

We have asked for contributions to go in Drumbeat before but so far we have received very few. Surely you have lots to tell about your visits, experiences, students, problems, tips, jokes and so on.

Please share them with us. If only a couple of lines or a longer article, members are really interested in the happenings.

Send your contribution to info@fotga.org.uk or by post (address at the top of the front page) We would love to hear from you
Editor.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held in June at Coventry which was selected as being near the centre of the country with good transport links.

There were 28 members and guests present and the Chairman outlined the past year noting that the Charity was stable and the new office had been re-roofed and was working well. Ousainou had been with us for 2 years and Ebrima our bookkeeper was doing a good job. The sign promoting FoTGA at the airport had led to a number of enquiries and there were new signs to the office.

The Treasurer reported that the Charity was in good shape and under control financially. The exchange and banking facility Bayba had been taken over by the Government and could no longer provide drawing facilities for student payments. This was now provided by our main bank, Standard Chartered. The rate of exchange had dropped during the year and forced us to increase the contribution for sending a bag of rice.

Sponsorship was in good shape and FoTGA is now supporting 202 students/ teachers and others. 256 school reports have been received, 84 letters and pictures to sponsors and 44 bags of rice delivered

Three Gambian visitors currently in the UK attended the meeting.

Kebba Cham gave a very interesting talk about the only Blind School in The Gambia. It is operated by GOVI (Gambian organisation for the Visually Impaired). He outlined their work and explained that blind people in The Gambia had very little help and were often treated badly. He explained their needs which included Braille machines and canes. FoTGA promised to assist with shipping.

Momodou Sanneh had nearly failed to get an education, but was sponsored and had gone on to become an accountant and came to the meeting to thank the Friends of The Gambia Association for making it all possible.

Our long standing friend and supporter, Max Jallow spoke of his involvement with FoTGA in The Gambia and in particular the annual Brufut run.

AGM Committee Changes

Peter Pickett stepped down as Chairman to concentrate on Sponsorship.

Andrew Beal was elected Chairman

Andrew's wife Naomi elected Membership Secretary.

Dennis Martin elected Vice Chairman

David Smith took over from Jeff Phillips as Hon Treasurer

Member Ina Bakker joins the Committee

We were sorry to hear that Roger Pickford has not been well and is standing down from the Committee for the time being. We wish him a speedy recovery

The full Committee line up is on page 11

Raffle

The AGM raffle in aid of Humanitarian funds was drawn and the winners were:

1st Prize £100

2nd Prize £50

3rd Prize £25

Other prizes of £10.

Ngaire Kewley

D Coker

Catherine Gander.

Kim Hodson,

Martin and Brenda Barlow,

Donald and Marjorie Wilkins

Congratulations to all.

Sponsorship review

Tom Jack and his Grandmother, Jean Bowers offered to review our Sponsorship during a holiday in The Gambia. Some of you will remember that for many years, Jean ran the FoTGA operation in The Gambia.

They spent most of their holiday visiting schools and students. They have provided us with a very useful report which has pointed up some problems and suggested some very useful improvements.

We thank them for the report and for devoting their holiday to FoTGA.

Send a bag of Rice



FoTGA can arrange for your sponsored child and their family to receive a bag of rice. Send a cheque for £25 to the Hon Treasurer (address on page 11) with the name of the student and FoTGA will do the rest.

Mendy World Travel

formerly **Biggar Travel**

Sponsors Brufut Caledonian
Nursery School

27 Well Street, Moffat,
DG10 9DP. SCOTLAND
01683 221188

tracy@mendyworldtravel.co.uk
www.mendyworldtravel.co.uk

Taxi “No Problem” as long as it’s “Green”

Not since the days of the wild-west and Wells Fargo have such a group of determined couriers been assembled as the Senegambia Tourist Taxi Drivers. No matter what the odds, spurred on by their controller Mr Sam Cessay, they will get you to any out of the way destination you may choose.



Their expertise at negotiating dust or water filled potholes that abound in every road except the recently tarmac ked strips never ceases to amaze me.

Surprisingly these men are very well organised, waiting for the controller to call when it is their turn for a fare. At times the wait for a fare can be several days. During the low season the wait can be a week. When the fare comes it could be a long trip to Kartong or Brikama, or just a short trip up the Badala Highway to a local hotel. The taxi drivers come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are family men who live locally. Many come from up country rural villages, and just come to the tourist areas to earn some Dalasi in

the season. This enables them to finance their families back home. Earning a living as a tourist taxi driver in The Gambia is not easy.

In the past Tourist Taxis were in bad states of repair, but now the Tourist Taxis are probably the safest vehicles in The Gambia. They are MOT road tested every year, and all are fitted with seat belts. Please use the belts as drivers could be fined heavily if caught with passengers not wearing them.

As part of his job the tourist taxi driver will also act as your guard and advisor for the whole trip. Most are very religious and honorable men, and you may be surprised to see them take prayers at 2.00pm and 5.00pm. One can only admire their great faith in the Koran.

I remember an experience with a taxi driver many years ago, in the old days, when taxis were held together with string. I asked the driver if he knew some friends of mine who had a compound in Kerr Sereign. He said “oh yes I know them”. With my wife and sister in law we got in the



taxi and the driver came round to use his special method of locking the car door when no handles are present. I was very confident of us reaching our destination, and then the driver started fiddling under the dashboard and pulled out a couple of wires. What are you doing I asked? Oh just starting the engine he said, the ignition switch is broken. He touched the wires together and the engine sprang

to life puffing a great plume of black smoke from the exhaust. Right! I thought: We are off leaving a dense smokescreen in our rear. That will stop anyone driving too close I thought.

To my astonishment we were heading away from my destination. I started to converse with the driver and explain his error. He said "Don't Worry, No Problem". I was speechless and said "You are lost mate". He just smiled, and a few minutes later drove into a garage. On arrival at the pumps he explained that if I could pay some of the fare now he would be able to buy petrol and take us to our destination. I thought the driver was pulling a fast one, but on looking at the fuel gauge banging on empty, I quickly realised that he was desperate for a few dalasi, and was living on the breadline. After a lot of Mickey taking from me, which the driver took in good heart, I am happy to say we reached our destination. Believe it or not this driver has since become a lifelong friend, and I use him every time I go to The Gambia. He has taught me so much about The Gambia, knowledge I would never have gained without him.

There are some 235 taxis at season time in Senegambia, Mansie Beach and Kololi Beach. All of these drivers are dependant on tourists to earn a living. They are trustworthy, honest, great guides and guards. Please use their services. You can contact Sam Cessay in the controllers office by the Kairaba and Senegambia hotel entrance turntable. He will call a suitable vehicle for your needs.

Please note that any items left in taxis are taken to the controllers office for reclaim by owners.



"Planting Hope for a Fruitful Harvest"

This is the time of year when we celebrate the gathering of the harvest with services in churches and varying country traditions and fairs taking place around the country. The harvest in our country has in the main been safely gathered in and is stored ready for shipment to our shops and supermarkets in order to feed the nation. What we cannot grow we import and although we and our families might feel the pinch as prices rise and our pound does not go as far as it did a year ago; do we starve? Of course we don't!

Just think for a moment about the families whose children we sponsor in The Gambia. The country's economy relies on tourism and agriculture. One of the main crops is groundnuts and along with rice, it forms a large part of the Gambian diet. For most of the recent years the groundnut harvest has been extremely poor. In one village which I visited a couple of years ago the storage compound, which normally flowing with the harvest had nuts in one corner. That is a disaster for a community that relies on its harvest. A bag of rice costs the equivalent of about a month's wages.



Our economy, whatever it is, will not leave us destitute. We may have to cut down on a few non-essentials but we will always be able to feed and clothe ourselves. Sometimes that may be at the expense of people we support in the third world who work for a pittance to supply us with cheap food and clothing. (By the way, why not try "Fair Trade" goods the next time that you go to the supermarket?)

Do they deserve a future?

our opinion of its state will We may have to cut down on we will always be able to feed Sometimes that may be at the support in the third world

One key to meeting the aspirations of young Gambians is a good health and education programme and one of the aims of Fotga is to work with local communities and government departments to assist in meeting that aim. The other is to link up sponsors to individual children to assist with their education.

The last Fotga sponsored project was to build a health centre in the village of Kerr Serign in response to a request from the village committee. The centre is staffed by the community and is overseen by a qualified nurse from one of the major clinics and provides a daily clinic and maternity facility. It also provides a venue for health education classes.

Our new project is the rebuild of the nursery school at Maka Ali Sarr in the North River Division. This nursery has been operating for a few years and



was originally built with funds raised by a member in memory of her late husband. The nursery school was badly damaged during violent storms a couple of years ago. Fotga is currently raising funds to rebuild the nursery to the same standard as the adjoining primary school. The target is £25,000 for a good quality building to the exacting standards of the government's education department.

When we drop our children off at the local nursery school, or drop into our local doctors surgery think of those families in rural Gambia who would walk for miles to ensure that their children access nursery education, or that they can receive basic health care, and of course that is if they can afford the education and healthcare in the first place.

Maka Ali Sarr nursery school is still operating from a classroom in the primary school and has been doing so with reduces pupil numbers since the damage caused by the storms has made the classrooms uninhabitable. It is important that the three classroom block is rebuilt as quickly as possible and certainly completed before next year's rainy season.

If we, in our small way, can sow the seeds of good health and education, then hopefully we can see those children blossom into confident adults with the ability and knowledge to contribute positively to the wellbeing of their families and to the economy of their country.

We can pray that what we plant will result in a fruitful harvest.

Rob Isdale Projects Manager (Hon)

Grades and Ages

School	Grade	Approx. Age
Nursery	Nursery 1 to 3	4-6
Lower Basic (Primary)	Grades 1 to 6	7-12
Upper Basic (Middle School)	Grades 7 to 9	13-15
Senior Secondary (High School)	Grades 10 to 12	16-18
End of basic FoTGA sponsorship scheme		

Some students then go on to Technical College or University if they are privately sponsored.

The Katey Dudley-Smith Scholarship sponsors a promising student through University from FoTGA funds.

Kim's Recipes for Life

A collection of Gambian and European dishes

Compiled and Edited by Rob and Margaret Isdale

In memory of their daughter Kim who died on 29th July 2005

Donations given in response to this book will go to

“The Friends of The Gambia Association” to assist with the cost of running the health care unit at Kerr Serign in The Gambia in memory of Kim

Suggested minimum donation £2

Contact: Rob Isdale—contact details opposite

Rob & Margaret will continue to add to the book and would be grateful for any recipies, anecdotes etc. for inclusion

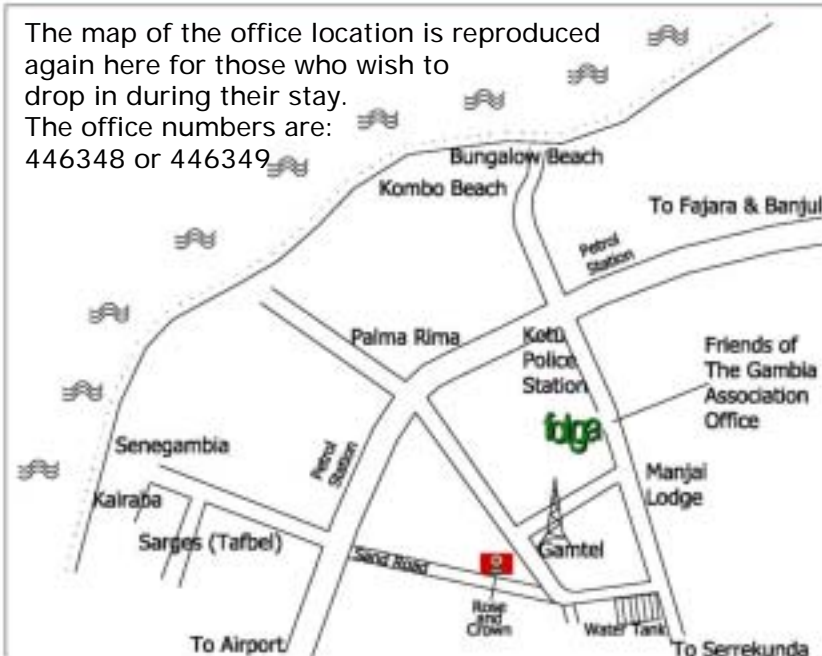


The new Dolphin

Those of you who knew and loved the Dolphin, will be pleased to know A new Dolphin restaurant and pub is under construction at Brufut.

More news as things progress.....

The map of the office location is reproduced again here for those who wish to drop in during their stay. The office numbers are: 446348 or 446349





Fond Memories



All aboard the ferry for Banjul

