

January 2010 Newsletter



**Enabling communities
to help themselves**

Visit to Nekemte: November 2009

On 12th November I set off in pouring rain to travel to Heathrow with Dick and Diana Benn. It was a joy this year to have over 2½ weeks of beautiful sunshine and warmth for our visit to Ethiopia. It is also a wonderful feeling to be greeted so joyfully by our friends and contacts in Addis and Nekemte and made to feel so welcome. We spent the first two days in Addis purchasing books, sports equipment and other resources, and also visited the Shola Library. We were very impressed with the work that is being done here - inspired by Yohannes Gebregeorgis, a man of vision.

The journey to Nekemte is quicker now as the road is good as far as Guder. As always it is amazing to see how much has been wrought in the space of only one year. The roads which were a quagmire last year are smooth and good. The number of taxis have increased or if you wish you can take a bajaj from the centre of the town to the hospital or out to Sarga. Buildings are springing up everywhere - several are new hotels. The Desalegn, where we stayed, is completed, and we were invited one evening to a new hotel and restaurant built in traditional style - tukul shaped rooms - near Wollega University. Electricity is no longer a problem since a new hydro electric plant services the whole country.

We were recognised, welcomed and even entertained during our school visits. I was very encouraged by the positive response

from all the schools that are linked with a school here in UK. The Ethiopian schools really seem to have taken on board their partnership commitment. The banners were received with enthusiasm and will help to emphasise the partnership aspect of the links. We also brought introductory letters from two further schools in UK to initiate two new partnership links.



The partnership banner from Broadclyst School given to Bekumsa Biya School

We were very pleased to meet the young women students at New Generation University and were able to bring news of them to their sponsors here in UK. We were delighted to see the children in the Day Care Centre and spent a morning with them. The development of libraries in schools has been a focus of Exeter Ethiopia Link for some years and it is very encouraging to see the progress.

All the schools with which we are involved have either a purpose built library or an

appropriate designated library room now. The elementary schools are now adding a 'zero grade' class (nursery), a government directive.



Penny teaching a group of children at the nursery at Bekumsa Biya School

We were also pleased to participate in the Saturday School for orphans - a VSO project, in a session in the children's section of the public library. We also made visits to the School for the Deaf, the Teacher Training College, and to view the progress of the Nekemte sports stadium.



A visit was also made to the Special Needs class at Burka Bekumsa School

This was my fourth visit to Nekemte and I should like to record my personal thanks to Ato Tesfaye Wodajo for all the help he has given us both during this visit and the last,

and most particularly to Qes Alemu for his organisation, help and care, and as always his thoughtfulness for our wellbeing.

Penny Pullen

Visit to Birka Jato School

We made our initial visit to Birka Jato school on a Monday afternoon, unannounced, during the second 'shift' of the day, to the lower, and usually younger, grades. Great excitement as we were soon recognised, staff and pupils coming from all directions. The most proficient English speaking teacher, Ato Bekele Siu who teaches the higher grades, was not in the school, however he was sent for and soon arrived on his bike. Packed into the Director's tiny, dark office with most of the teachers, we all examined the content of the Story Bag of 'The Wild Things' produced by Exminster School. We made an arrangement to visit at 8.30 am. the next morning when I spent half an hour going through the bag with two English speaking teachers who were to assist us present it to a class of 8-10 year old children. We discussed how to do this using Mrs Whalley and Miss Phillip's methods and suggestions, together with Ato Bekele Siu and Ato Diriba's ideas.

I was introduced to the class, big wide eyes and very still. I read the story and showed the pictures to the children as I read, describing unfamiliar things and situations. Ato Diriba translated sounding confident and smooth. There was hardly a sound or a movement from the children but they followed every move I made with their eyes, watching the book intently then watching their teacher translate. We then placed the Bag on a table and took out the content, showing everything to the children and explaining each object(s) or asking what they thought it was for, where it fitted in. Sometimes tricky but we managed !

Then we invited them up in groups, very difficult as they all swarmed up, and let them try out the various forms of puppets. They set the 'stage' out with the smaller stick puppets then they all had a go with the sock puppets pretending to be 'Wild Things'. After a moment they all stopped being scared and leapt around stamping and growling. Max's crown was tried on, the map and picture of the sailing boat were closely examined and there were questions about the food on the plates.



Children with the puppets and the teacher as 'King Max'

There was great curiosity over Max's dressing up costume - something they seldom do. In fact you could say they went ballistic trying it all out, touching and asking about everything. There were lots of questions and interpretations, the children showed us anger, joy, sadness - we just let them get on with it, except the teachers wanted a go too!

The children (and their teachers) had never seen or handled such exotic and unfamiliar objects, for example, a sailing boat is a very rare sight as Ethiopia has no sea and very few lakes in the Nekemte area. Also, acting out characters from a story is almost unheard of!

Diana Benn

Nekemte Eye Clinic

December 31st 2009 marked the end of our commitment to the Nekemte Community Rural Eye Care Service. During the initial six months after transfer of the Pilot Project to 'Light for the World' the Link paid the Clinic Manager's (Rev Alemu Nega) salary. It was gratifying to learn that the final evaluation report prepared by the Link enabled two government departments (Health and Economic Development) to enter agreements alongside Light for the World and the Mekane Yesus Church which will sustain this specialist health service. Satellite clinics are being planned in order to extend the reach of the service. The Clinic now has a vehicle in order to reach more marginalised communities. The clinic expects to provide 800 cataract surgeries within 12 months. There will be an additional surgery from visiting expatriates. In all it is estimated that 40,000 people will receive a service from the clinic (e.g. health education for 17,000 people). None of this would have been possible without the generosity of the Four Acre Trust, local donors and the energy and enthusiasm of the Link management team from 2005 to 2009. Alexis Taylor

Ed: In acknowledgment of all Alexis' hard work, she was nominated for the Express & Echo's 'Bouquet of the Week' back in November - an appropriate local recognition of all the hard work she put in on this very successful and pioneering project in Nekemte.

NOTICE of the Link AGM

The 2010 Annual General Meeting of the Exeter Ethiopia Link will be held on Saturday 20th March at 1.30.pm at the St Sidwell's Centre, Sidwell Street, Exeter. The meeting will be preceded by a bring-and-share buffet lunch from 12.30.pm and followed by presentations on the 2009 visits to Ethiopia and discussion of the future programme, ending at 4 pm.

Our thanks to the following fundraisers:

Ø Martha King who got married last year to Pete Gaches. They raised about £650 for the Link from donations - a refreshing change to the usual request that 'presents' go towards a honeymoon holiday. Maybe some others might take a leaf out of their book? Many thanks to all the people who gave money and for Martha and Pete for having the idea in the first place.

Ø Exmoor Rotary who recently sent £1,100 for the Spectacle Unit.

Ø The 2nd Withycombe Guides who raised £178 from a sponsored Pyjama Walk on the beach at Exmouth.

easyfundraising.org.uk

Shopping on the Internet? If so, you can raise money for the link at no extra cost.

1. Visit www.easyfundraising.org.uk
2. Register choosing Exeter-Ethiopia Link as your chosen cause.
3. Before purchasing an item - log-in to easyfundraising and search for the retailer you wish to use (over 600 to choose from including Amazon, Boots, Next, Argos etc)
4. Make your purchase as normal and a percentage (varies from each retailer) will automatically be donated to the link: £143 has been raised in the last year. Use www.easysearch.org.uk as your search engine and even more money will go the link. Happy Shopping and Searching...

Media/Publicity Officer Wanted

The committee is keen to find somebody who would be interested in taking on this role in order to give the Link a higher local public profile. If you're interested and would like to know more about this please contact Mark Howells on 01392-202713 or mshowells@blueyonder.co.uk

Exeter-Ethiopia Link

The Exeter-Ethiopia Link was set up in 1987 to promote a Community Link between Exeter in Devon, England and Hareto in Wollega, Ethiopia. In 1994 the Link included the town of Nekemte.

The Link supports: Health, Water, Women's and Educational projects in Hareto and Nekemte and links between schools in Exeter and the communities in Ethiopia.

For further information contact:

Peter Grainger tel: 01392-435648
Email: petergrainger@eclipse.co.uk

or (for membership)

Ella Huffman : 01404-871372
Email: ellahuffman@lycos.com

or view our website:

www.exeterethiopia.org

*Any copy for future newsletters can be sent to the editor, Bruce Hebbard, at Cedar House, Pines Road, Exeter EX2 9EN
tel: 01392-437479 or by e-mail to b.hebbard@talk21.com*

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