

# FRIENDS OF KAIRA KONKO NEWSLETTER

Patron: Dame Mary Fagan JP, Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire



**Kaira Konko**  
Scout Fellowship

## Issue 5: September 2011

Firstly, please accept our apologies for not sending a newsletter out last year. Despite this, KK is going from strength to strength with lots happening behind the scenes.



We are thrilled to inform you that Lamin Kinteh, our Project Manager, has just been awarded an Honorary Commonwealth MBE for services to Scouting and educational projects. The British High Commissioner in Banjul rang him personally to tell him of the award and to congratulate him. The actual presentation will take place in The Gambia next February when the Lord Lieutenant will be visiting.

### Kaira Konko

Kaira Konko is doing well. The refurbishment is almost complete and within budget which is a relief! The reputation of good, clean accommodation is spreading and many guests stay on recommendation. In one of the travel books KK is described as 'a warm hug after a long journey'. Visitors love the friendliness of the Scouts, the warm welcome they receive, the fact it is community based and non profit making.

KK is now self supporting in its day to day running costs, including wages of the staff. KK employs a manager, deputy manager, housekeeper and domestic help. Others are employed when extra help is needed e.g. when large groups are staying or workshops are being held at KK. This gives our Scouts the opportunity to earn money to help their families. Scouts receiving sponsorship through school help out in the garden and keep the compound neat and tidy. They all muck in when the need arises. It is still an amazing place to be.

The KK garden continues to be productive providing food, some of which is taken to Scout families and the remainder is sold with the proceeds paying for more seeds, fruit trees etc. The Scouts are very good at taking cuttings and selling them.

### The Refurbishment

The hall, bedrooms and bathroom in the main building, have been completely renovated which included major structural work. The roof was taken off the whole building and the old wooden roof beams and supporting pillars were taken out. Metal roof trusses were installed and new corrugate roof put on. The removal of the pillars means much more space in the hall. By rearranging some



of the internal bedroom and bathroom walls means one less bedroom in the main building but two extra bathrooms. An absolute necessity when groups are staying. One of the bedrooms has an en suite and one has a 'Jack and Jill' door so can be en suite or locked off and accessed from the corridor as a communal bathroom.



It is a practical, versatile arrangement which can accommodate groups and the needs of regular visitors to KK. The bathrooms have good quality fixtures and fittings and tiled walls. The floors throughout the building

have been tiled.

The Bantaba was next to be refurbished. This building consists of the open covered eating/meeting area, the kitchen, kitchen store and the office. The building has been re-roofed with metal roof trusses and new corrugate. The old kitchen has been taken out and good quality units are being made in Banjul, hopefully they will arrive soon! The floors throughout have been tiled. A large gas cooker has been installed making life a lot easier for groups staying. Our girl Scouts still cook delicious traditional meals over a wood fire too.

The refurbishment has been a major expense and it would not have been possible without the help of generous donations from The Jason Chant Good Deeds Fund, Winchester University, The Bulldog Trust, Mr Tony Chambers and All Saints Junior School, Fleet. We would like to thank everyone who has fund raised and helped with the sale of t shirts donated by 3 mobile. We now have a compound that is 'fit for purpose' and with good maintenance will last for years to come.

The number of local people we have been able to employ has been a spin off from monies spent on the refurbishment. These included Boro our trusty mason, Sori and Alaji our carpenters, a local plumber, electrician, painter and tiler. There are also the donkey cart boys who bring supplies from the town to KK and so on. Their earnings will in turn be spent locally so fuelling the locally economy. A huge thank you must go to Lamin Kinteh and the Scouts at KK for the hard work they have put into the refurbishment. We know they are very proud of what has been achieved and we are proud of them too.

### Dame Mary Fagan

Our Patron, Dame Mary visited KK in February 2010. She was accompanied by Prof Joy Carter, Vice Chancellor of Winchester University and by the British High Commissioner to The Gambia, Phil Sinkinson and his wife Claire. Following lunch at KK we toured the compound and officially opened the bedroom sponsored by Winchester University. This was followed by a visit to Soma School to open the Winchester University classroom. The British High Commissioner was overwhelmed by the welcome received from the people of Soma who lined the street to the school shouting 'Welcome'. He said that in all his diplomatic career he had never seen such a welcome. He asked his driver, had he ever seen



anything like this before and he replied 'Yes sir, when Dame Mary came last time'. This shows the affection in which she is held by the people of Soma. This year through Winchester University Dame Mary has launched the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Appeal aiming to raise £20,000 to build two new classrooms at Soma School and refurbish the girls hostel building at Tahir High School ([www.winchester.ac.uk/gambia](http://www.winchester.ac.uk/gambia)).

As Chancellor of the University Dame Mary has encouraged links between their department for teacher training to link with Soma School and in January 2011 six undergraduate teachers and two lecturers spent two weeks working at Soma School. They were so enthused by what they saw and achieved that we can see this becoming a permanent link.

#### Other visits

There have been several groups from the UK visiting KK, including All Saints School, Magellan Explorer Scouts, Winchester University and the KK committee. Trips already planned for the future include Explorer Scouts from Cambridge, Scout Active Support members. Lord Lieutenant and Vice Chancellor of Winchester University.

#### Sponsorship

Lamin Darbo has completed his Certificate in Business Management, Mbake has completed a year's course in Business Management and is now back in Soma and Kemo Sabally is in his last year of a four year Business and Construction course. Kemo is now a competent builder and has already completed several builds in Soma. Through cultural difficulties it is often not possible for the girls to go to Banjul to attend college. We are looking at ways of training them locally so that they don't miss out on the education experience. We still have approximately fifty of our Scouts, both boys and girls, being sponsored through school at any one time. When we are in Soma parents always come to express their thanks. If everyone who reads this newsletter could find one sponsor we could do so much more.



#### The Soma Community

Lamin Kinteh was invited to sit on a committee which oversees the local council. This is something usually only village elders are asked to do. This reflects the high esteem in which he is held within his community. He continues to be a point of contact for local people in real need. Recently a family lost the roof of their compound during the rains and he was able to supply materials for a new roof.

Kinteh is also a governor of Soma Lower Basic School. The Scouts regularly assist with projects in Soma and surrounding villages.

#### Scout Band

A well kept secret by the KK Scouts was their band. Instruments and recorders had been donated from the UK but we had no idea that within two weeks they would be able to form a band and play four tunes, including the Gambia national anthem. They are now asked to play at local events and played in front of President Jammeh. They have become quite famous! To see twenty Scouts plus instruments including a bass drum get into the back and on top of a Nissan Navara is quite a sight. We are very proud of them.



#### Administration

Last year saw changes within Scouting regarding the Fellowship. Scout Headquarters have decided to change the name from Fellowship to Scout Active Support so we are in the process of changing our name to Kaira Konko Scout Active Support. This will not affect current standing orders as our bank account details remain the same.

Thank you all for your support. In view of the increase in postage rates we are looking to produce an e-version of future newsletters. If you would agree to receiving your copy by e-mail in future please contact Anthea Bailey on [antheabailey@btopenworld.com](mailto:antheabailey@btopenworld.com) so that your e-mail address can be recorded.

If you wish to contact us for any other purpose please do so through the website

[www.kairakonko.com](http://www.kairakonko.com) and this will be directed to Marion Christmas.



#### Christmas cards

The committee have this year produced Christmas Cards which are available to purchase at 6 for £4. They show a group of young people in front of KK holding up placards which read "Happy Christmas". The cards are available from members of the committee or contact us and we will tell you who is your nearest contact.

## Hampshire Explorer Scouts visit Kaira Konko January 2011 by Jackie Heath



Straight after Christmas, after a year of preparation, training and fund raising, twenty three Explorer Scouts, members of KKSAS and other leaders headed off for a African adventure.

On arrival at Banjul we sped through the dark night in the back of jeeps, the heat of the African air hitting us for the first time. All we could see was the odd fire on the roadside. We spent the night at Tunami Tenda, an eco camp run by volunteers from the local village where we were introduced to The Gambia in a dug out canoe and went on a village walk. Early next morning we headed up to Kaira Konko. The most wonderful sights and sounds greeted us, as the new Kaira Konko Scout band, in full uniform, came down the road playing tunes to the beat of the drums accompanied by all the Scouts. It was a tremendous welcome.

After settling in to the beautifully refurbished lodge we started project work in earnest and during our two week achieved absolutely loads!

Our main project was building permanent accommodation for the staff at KK –The Crew Room. For a couple of years we have highlighted the need for older Scouts to have a place to stay at KK when they are on duty. There needs to be somebody there all the time to greet guests and for security. Up until now they have slept on the floor or lived in tents so a basic crew room was important. This was very much a joint project with the Gambian scouts who built the foundations and started making blocks before we arrived. Then together we made a thousand more, lay the concrete floor, built the walls and cast the concrete eaves beam. After we left, the roof was erected. It was a very successful project resulting in a small bunk room and veranda.



We worked at four schools during our stay. At New Soma Lower Basic we painted one classroom and decorated with a fantastic illustrated alphabet. We also painted a library and completely cleared it and sorted the books. This school is desperate for a boundary wall to enclose its grounds as at present it is open so traffic, goats and donkey carts pass through to disrupt lessons.

At Soma Proper Lower Basic we painted a fabulous mural on the outside of one of the classrooms. We invited an internationally known Gambian artist Njogu Touray to lead our young people in a street art project. The inspiration was the national anthem which was stencilled on the wall.



Then all the Explorers sketched their ideas and Njogu very skilfully integrated them and the Explorers painted a truly exception piece of art.

At Karantaba School we found the roof had blown off three classrooms two years ago rendering them useless. The headmaster had just enough money to replace one roof. We were able to pay for all the roofs to be completed to a high standard. In preparation, the Explorers painted the walls white, decorated the walls and mended the concrete floors to prevent termites entering the classrooms. The regional education officer organised new furniture to be in place before we left. So now there are enough classes for all the children to attend school in the morning.



At Kanni Kunda School we worked with the carpenter to repair broken desks to furnish a room. One of our scouts, Lamin Sanneh, is a teacher at this school and several Explorers spent mornings teaching in his class. They really enjoyed this and it helps the children to hear English spoken as a mother tongue.

One night we camped in the school yard and cooked on a fire at Fonkoi Kunda. Ruff's garden (Ruth Farmers) is at this school and was looking very well cared for. At night the villagers descended and we had a great campfire. The next day the Explorers, with Gambian Scouts as translators, visited each compound in the village carrying out a survey about malaria prevention. Our plan for a future project is to fundraise for bed nets to protect people from mosquito bites, but the first step was to carry out research to see how many people had nets. It turned out that there were some nets in the village but not enough and many were old with large holes in them. Two deaths were reported to be due to malaria, although the cause of death is of course not always known. There is certainly a very real need for bed nets in this village.

We visited the hospital and took spectacles, knitted baby bonnets, medicines, bandages, mops and cleaning equipment. We also collected a list of things the hospital requires which included a microscope, slides and other lab equipment.

At KK itself we ran two very successful Scout evenings for 150 scouts, cubs and beavers. We made a swing boat which all the scouts loved by cutting branches down to make the poles and then working with the older Gambian scouts to build it. They were planning to rebuild it at a forthcoming district camp. Thank you to Lamin and Fatou Kinteh, and the scouts at KK for a fantastic trip that touched so many people and brought much laughter, happiness and practical skills to all concerned.



## All Saints School, Fleet - Trip to The Gambia - February 2011

On our arrival we were delighted to be welcomed by the Kaira Konko Scout Band, who had made considerable progress in their recorder skills since our last visit. Over the weekend, we enjoyed spending time visiting the Soma market and working with the children/Scouts on a number of creative activities at the Kaira Konko Scout Lodge. When we visit Soma, we are often overwhelmed by the warm welcomes we receive from all members of the community. On our first day at The Soma School, we were enthusiastically welcomed by the staff and pupils with an assembly and a performance of the Gambian national anthem.

Whilst touring the school we were delighted to see such significant changes within the school grounds and inside the classrooms under the leadership of the new head-teacher Lamin Njie. This year we made 'creativity' the focus of our work at the Soma school. We very much enjoyed leading activities such as African art landscapes, exchanging details of daily life through post-cards, making collages in the ground using natural resources, storytelling with actions, leading singing, and comparing our school grounds through art work and looking at pictures.

This year, we also set up a joint curriculum project through the means of dance. To celebrate our link and as part of the forthcoming Dance Challenge event, we have been working on an African life dance with a group of Year 5/6 children. We thoroughly enjoyed teaching the same dance to selected children from the Soma School. As part of the dance, we form together to create the Gambian flag and represent its unique meaning (red - sun shining over the Gambia, blue - River Gambia, green - land/ agriculture, white - peace/ unity) through movement/ costume colour. During our stay, we spent time shopping for materials in the Soma market and have been able to buy African prints in the colours of the Gambian flag for our dancers to wear.

During our stay in Soma, we were delighted to see such positive changes within the school under the leadership of the new head-teacher Lamin Njie. We are always motivated by the changes that have been made each time we visit. Most significantly, we were amazed by the progress of the Scout Band. During our time at Kaira Konko, the children continued to practice their instruments for hours every day and their perseverance was a real joy to see.

### **Gambia Diamond Jubilee Project:**

Over the years our children have enjoyed exchanging letters, stories, songs and music. Within our curriculum, we provide opportunities for our children to learn about life in Soma and we have seen at first hand the impact this has on our children. The result of having a successful partnership ultimately encourages our children to become active global citizens as is evident in the 'grow a £1' projects that have been taking place. We have been inspired by the sense of ownership our children have applied to this project and it's been wonderful to hear about and see the creative activities the children have been leading. **We have raised a staggering £6,701 in the Grow a Pound Project.**

Carmella Reece

