

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SCOUTS BWAISE UPDATE

October 2006

This is an update on the Northamptonshire Scouts Bwaise project following the visit between the 9th & 20th October by Dean Smith, Keith Shackleton and Carole Stephenson



This update will be read by people with both Scouting and non-Scouting backgrounds and has been (hopefully) written to cover both needs. If you require any further information then please e-mail Dean Smith on dean099@aol.com

Background

The Northamptonshire Scouts Bwaise project was initiated following a visit to Uganda in 1995 by Dean, Keith & Carole. Outspan Day and Boarding Primary School had just been established in that year and provided the ideal opportunity for a joint educational project between young people involved in Scouting in Northamptonshire and the young people at the school.

Outspan school is situated in a slum area in the North West of Kampala (the capital city of Uganda) called Bwaise.

Initially the project was developed as a joint awareness project of how young people grow up in two different countries. A significant number of presentations were made to all age ranges in Northamptonshire Scouts and to some external organisations. This was supported by written resource material. The interest prompted fundraising and in 1996 the first of a number of significant financial contributions were made to the school, initially for the everyday requirements of the school in respect of writing materials, books, chalk, and even a school bell! This type of support has continued throughout the eleven years of the project and has also included band equipment and other specialist resources. Particularly when the Ugandan Education Authorities change the curriculum and a whole load of new books are required!

In 1997 a 56-person expedition of young people (and not so young) visited Uganda from Northamptonshire Scouts and spent three weeks in the country visiting the school and the country as a whole. This had two major implications (apart from everyone having a great time and providing direct support to the school)

Firstly, it introduced a number of new people to Uganda, and many of these have become additional 'torch bearers' for Outspan School and have continued to support the school as a part of a loose coalition based around the 'Bwaise Project' and from both within and outside Scouting that continues to the current day.

Secondly, the expedition itself secured a considerable contingency fund to enable fast repatriation of anyone who was unexpectedly taken ill. By a combination of good planning and luck this was never used, and on their return the expedition unanimously agreed to contribute this money to developing the school buildings. This marked a significant change in the direction and support given to the school and this support also continues with both small donations for improvement to facilities and larger external contributions being made for significant building work.

As a direct result of the project, the school continues to function well. There have been at least two major problems over the eleven years when without direct intervention from the project the school would have been forced to close. Overall the ethos of the contributions has been to support the school in a way that

allows the Ugandan Head Teacher and staff to develop the school themselves. The project never set out to be an aid agency and we have tried to maintain that stance. This is a school for Ugandan people, who run it as they want to.

Over the eleven years, the school has developed in that:

- ❑ It has moved about a 100metres away to a new site to remove the rental burden and now owns the land upon which it sits (but see the update later)
- ❑ The perimeter has been secured
- ❑ The wooden buildings have been replaced by purpose built brick buildings
- ❑ The school has purchased a School Bus
- ❑ The first phase of a first storey extension is now nearly complete over a part of the initial brick buildings
- ❑ Academic achievement is being sustained and improved upon

Sponsorship of children has been a constant theme of the project, running alongside the other fundraising initiatives and still continues. This involves individuals (both Scouting and non-Scouting), Scout Groups and Fellowships. We have always promised that every penny donated, will go to the child, and we have maintained that ideal throughout. Additionally sponsorship directly helps the school as the sponsored children are invariably taken from the children who board at the School. These children are existing pupils, who as a result of immediate family bereavement need support, so the school provides for these children in a pastoral and financial way through to secondary education and beyond. It uses any funds it can utilise to do this. When we arrange sponsorship of these children not only does it provide significant support to the child, both financially and morally, but also relieves the school of the burden so they can utilise the money elsewhere.

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Outspan

The school continues to thrive academically with the head teacher Dismas Otoori exceptionally pleased with the latest results in the Primary Leaving Examination, a test set by the Government and taken by students before leaving primary school and progressing to secondary school. There was a 100% pass rate at Outspan, against the trend in Uganda generally. This is a significant achievement. There are currently 430 pupils at the school, 57 of these are boarders. The largest classroom size is 65 children.

The school is now using the new first storey classrooms, although they are not yet finished in respect of plaster and windows. This extension significantly improves the teaching space of the school, but because it hasn't yet been finished, the school looks a little more run down than it has previously. Hopefully this is a temporary blip, and before we left we gave them a cheque for 6 million Uganda Shillings (£1800) to complete the building and restore the distinctive purple finish to the school. This money is the money we managed to get back from the 'tax man' as Gift Aid as a result of a significant non-Scouting donation for the school made specifically for building improvement. This, together with some Scout funding has allowed this extension to be built in the first place. However further funds are required to complete the rest of the first floor construction, which will provide a much better teaching and learning environment and improve the facilities for the boarders.

The first phase of the first floor extension clearly visible on the right, with the school bus in the foreground

The second phase will be developed here



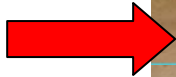
These classrooms are in use, but we encouraged the completion of the remainder of the building.

Carole with Tom Ngobi, the founder of Outspan.



The last remaining wooden classroom buildings on the site have now been demolished which leaves an extended play area, which is under utilised. The plan is not to replace these with classrooms, but rather open fronted shelters to protect the children from the sun and the rain during break times and support other outdoor activities. Extra funding will be needed for this work.

Site of previous wooden classrooms now intended to be open fronted shelters.



View taken from the extension, looking towards the school gate

The Scouting activities at the school continue to thrive, with a very enthusiastic leader who encourages the Scouts to wear their uniform to school to show they are proud to be Scouts. The Scouts regularly take part in District based competitions and seem to be doing very well. Along with the Band they are clearly a focal point for the school and are utilised in that way. We were treated to the usual flag break ceremony at the school led by the Scouts and the Band, and once again, the music (the best we have heard in eleven years!) echoed throughout Bwaise. This is still an impressive and distinctive event that sets the ethos and style of the school.



Neckerchiefs (of all colours) are for many the only Scout uniform they have

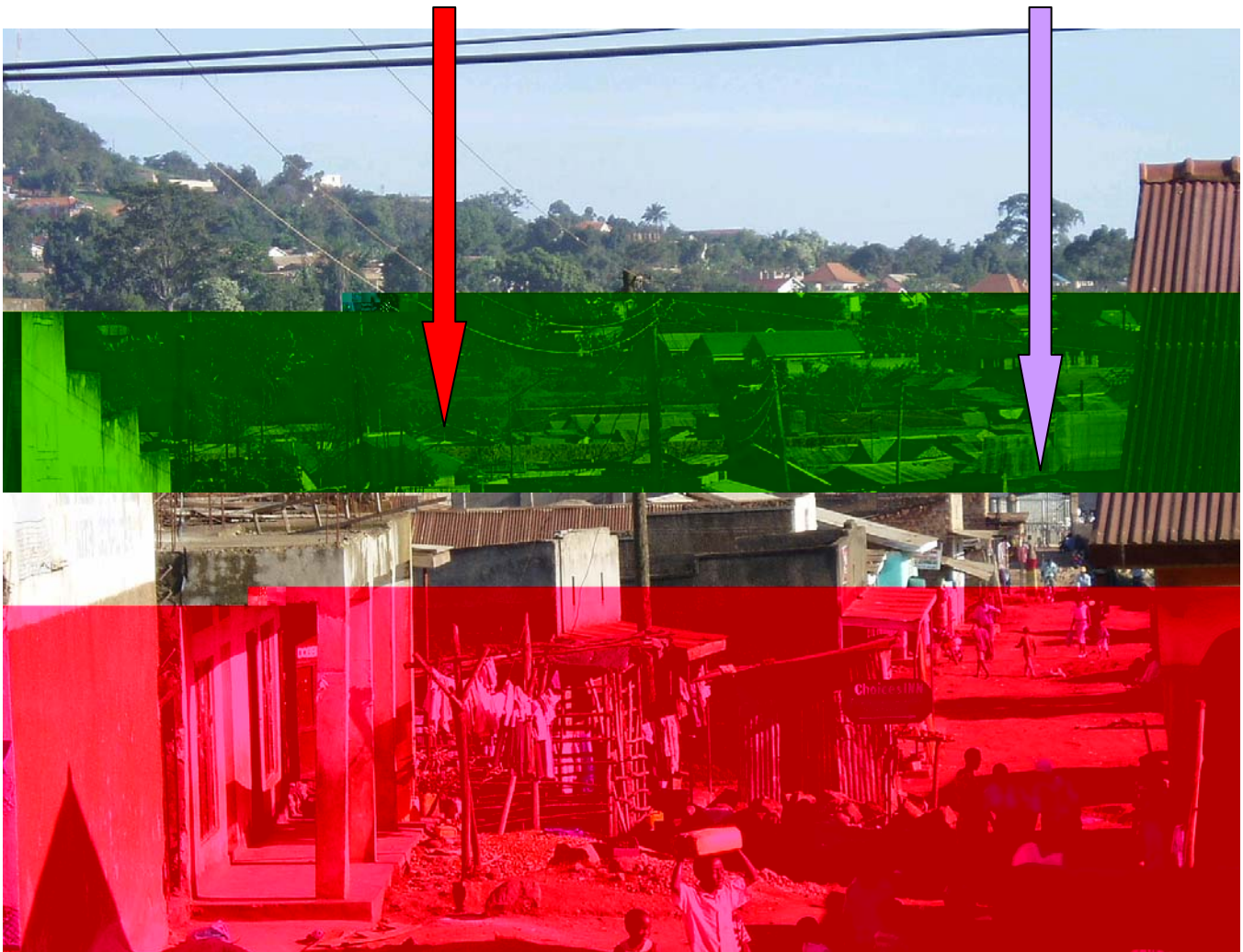
Flag break, involves the Ugandan National Flag (centre), the Union Flag (right) and the World Scout Flag (left)



As mentioned earlier the site of the school has changed slightly since 1995, when as a result of consistent increases in rent (due mainly because the landlord knew the school was supported by the project!) the school acquired its own land about a 100 metres away and re-established the school here. What we have now learnt is that whilst the school ‘owns’ the land in the normal sense of the term, all of the land in Bwaise actually belongs to the King of Buganda (the central tribal land part of Uganda) and can therefore never be completely ‘owned’ by anyone else. What therefore must be negotiated is a complex ‘leasehold’ type arrangement with the King’s land board to establish legally the status of the School. This is completed by first having a surveyor draw up formal plans of the site, and then contractual negotiations utilising a lawyer to secure the leasehold. What this does is that in the event of any reclaiming of the land by the king (the Kabaka), compensation will then be paid. Whilst this is in itself unlikely in Bwaise, it was a sobering sight to see the new Kampala northern by-pass being driven straight through Bwaise approximately 750 metres from the School. Bearing in mind what can happen in Uganda, we are not too sure that the government went to the bother of a Public Inquiry and compensation to those people affected by the new road. In these circumstances, to secure both the schools and our own investment for the future we have released a small amount of finance for the legal requirements of this ‘leasehold’ process to be completed.

Site of new road (running left to right)

School gates



View taken from the top of the road leading down to the school

Sponsorship continues to thrive and there are currently 26 children receiving funding from people in Northamptonshire as a direct result of the Bwaise project. Fifteen of these children are still administered through the project. Most of these are still at Outspan, although many have continued to be supported as they progress through their secondary education. We were delighted to learn that one of the children, sponsored initially through the project, has now been accepted at Makerere University in Kampala to study as a lawyer.

This area of work has still some considerable potential for growth with the overall number of children boarding at the school standing at 57. Not all of these are orphans, with some parents choosing to board their child at Outspan. Fees for boarding students have now been revised by the school and are currently set at 202,000 USH per term (three terms a year). With the addition of a uniform, **sponsorship of a child at Outspan currently costs £200 per year (less than £17 per month by Standing Order).**

In return for this sponsors are provided with an end of term report on the progress of the child and the opportunity to exchange letters once the sponsorship has been established. The project continues to ensure that all the money donated goes to the child. Sponsorship fees do increase slightly from one year to the next, the same as everywhere in the world, but generally the fees have remained stable. There is an increase when the child goes to secondary school, but this varies dependent on the type of school involved.

There are currently opportunities available to sponsors children and if you would like to discuss this more to see if it is for you or your Scout Group/Organisation, then please speak to Dean Smith for further information.



Dean with some of the children currently sponsored at Outspan School

Kampala & Uganda

The changes in Kampala over the eleven years are very significant, and the pace of improvement was quickened over the last four years. Kampala is certainly getting to be a cleaner place due to the new Mayor of Kampala taking over and there is clear evidence of a new civic pride establishing itself. We are not too sure if the Mayors plan to remove the bus parks to the edge of the city will ever become a reality, but it must be worth a try, as the one of the things that seems to have got significantly worse is the traffic congestion.

Kampala is very much an up and coming tourist destination and there is now a significant increase in the number of tourist. The hotel upgrades and new builds is going at full speed leaving the old 'best hotels' such as the Sheraton and the Speke now looking tired and worn. A significant part of this new development is being driven forward by the plans to hold the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kampala in October 2007. This will allow Kampala and Uganda generally to present itself as a modern country with most of its troubles behind it. Although looking at some of the building progress CHOGM may yet suffer the same inconvenience as Wembley Stadium in making sure everything is done on time!

Taking advantage of these new facilities, when we asked the senior staff at the school where they would like to join us for Dinner, they unanimously decided on the new Serena Hotel (previously the Nile Hotel – where the expedition saw the cultural dancing)



Tom (Founder), Dean, Florence (Administrator), Keith, Carole & Dismas (Head teacher) at the Serena Hotel, Kampala

Outside of Kampala, Uganda generally remains the same other than the arrival of the ubiquitous mobile phone. Crop production appears healthy and sustained and of course the overall cheerfulness of the people remains infectious. There is only one area of concern and that is in the generation of electricity and the realisation that to power the turbines at the Owen Falls Dam the Ugandans have taken too much water out of Lake Victoria. This is now being rectified with the inevitable 'power sharing' taking place throughout the country (in plain English – periodical power cuts).

Whilst in Uganda, Dean, Keith and Carole maintained their custom of visiting a new part of the country and this time visited the East and in particular the Sipi Falls area of Mount Elgon. This is a beautiful part of the world and it was a delight to walk through this stunning landscape. Additionally, Dismas took Dean & Carole to the 'Hairy Lemon' backpackers hostel situated on an island in the middle of the River Nile just North of the Source. This is a delightful, peaceful spot where the basic requirement is to 'do nothing' and relax. The significance to Dismas became apparent when we arrived in the area when we realised that this is where Dismas was born and brought up and where a number of years ago he started his teaching career. It was fascinating to hear him tell his stories on the area and reminisce of when he used to visit the island as a child and could remember when the river still had the crocodiles and the hippo's. In his words they have since 'migrated' further down the river where it is less noisy.

Uganda is a fascinating country to visit, and if you are going there, in any capacity, and would like any advice, then let us know – we have lots of people who would be delighted to talk to you.



Sipi Falls – the view from the shower!