

# The Gambian Schools Trust

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## Newsletter Summer 2016

In last year's report we highlighted problems with the availability of water in both urban and rural areas as a result of the shorter rainy season, also economic difficulties brought on by the Ebola crisis in West Africa: we are pleased to report that the situation is now easier thanks to normal rainfall and the return of tourists.

Naata nursery school is now connected to the local piped water supply thanks to Walbottle Campus in Newcastle. At Loumen everyone is delighted with their new solar-powered bore hole and send their thanks and prayers to Derek Shuttleworth who personally funded this project. It has been possible to double the size of both the Ladies and School Gardens. We also provided a well at Sambajang Bessu: Alan Rose has written about this below.

Our major construction project this winter saw our 9<sup>th</sup> Library successfully built at Kunkujang Upper Basic School: thanks once again to the Staff, Pupils and Parents at Walbottle Campus. The Library was constructed, furnished, stocked and then opened in grand style in April. Our next improvement planned for this rapidly expanding urban school is the provision of a computer room with computers donated by Horton Grange Primary School in Bradford.

At this point we would like to bring to your attention the Gambian Governments' 2020 vision of free and compulsory education for all children. Already fees have been abolished for Lower Basic and Upper Basic Pupils, this year Senior Secondary School fees will be abolished from September. An education tax has been levied on all businesses to fund the program. International organisations including the World Bank and the African Development Bank are contributing to the expansion in infrastructure needed to accommodate the substantial increase in pupils.

On a more individual level we would like to bring you a success story. We first met Hassan Jallow in 2004 when the charity built its first Library. His great thirst for knowledge was not satisfied by the 30 minute classes in the Library and he approached us to supply him with books. Because of his persistence and enthusiasm, we supplied him with more advanced books to read at home. In 2013 he enrolled on a computer Degree Course at The University of the Gambia. To assist him with his studies the charity supplied him with a computer for home. Even though he has not yet graduated he and a friend have started a computer software company, Assutech, and have developed and sold software to, among others, The Chamber of Commerce for Export Documentation and The Daily Observer for an app enabling subscribers to read the paper on their mobile, tablet or computer: they are currently working on an application for the Forex Bureaux.

The Charity continues to provide a nutritious school meal for 750 pupils a day, pay teachers' salaries, fund teacher training and maintain our nursery buildings. This means that we need to raise £1500 every month. If you would like to help with a fund-raising event, donation or standing order, please contact us by email or telephone. Forms can be downloaded from [www.gambianschools.org](http://www.gambianschools.org)

Once again our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all individuals and organisations who support our efforts in The Gambia.

Keep up the good work!

Maggie Boyle was one of Britain's most respected traditional singers: she worked with Steve Tilston, John Renbourn, Gary Boyle, Pete Morton and Paul Downes, as well as being a member of the acclaimed trio Grace Notes.

Her exquisite voice reached an even wider audience through her contributions to the soundtrack of films such as **Patriot Games**. She was a keen supporter of The Trust, and earlier this year, a very appropriate memorial was created in her honour through donations collected in her memory.

**On The Opening Of 'Maggie's Well'**  
by Alan Rose

Maggie passed away on 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2014. As well as being a consummate singer of songs, mainly drawn



from her Irish heritage, she was the mother of Joe and Molly, the grandmother of Betty Sue, and the partner of Bill. She was a long-time supporter of The Gambian Schools Trust, singing at many charity concerts, and always buying their cards instead of giving presents at Christmas. In conjunction with The Trust, the folk music community raised £5,000 to provide a sealed hand pump well for Sambajang Bessu, a small village near Farafeni, on the north bank of the River Gambia.

The opening ceremony was held in early January 2016. Along with the villagers and local leaders, it was attended by a visiting group of involved people, which



included Joe Tilston (Maggie's son), Lynda Hardcastle (one of Maggie's singing partners from the celebrated group Grace Notes), Christine Schofield (who started The Trust and was the trustee responsible for coordinating the fund-raising),

Steve and Hilary Lawther (the trustees who supervised the actual well-building and coordinated the opening ceremony) and The Honourable Osman Bah (the local MP). The villagers pulled out all the stops, providing a tumultuous welcome, food, drink, music, dancing and short speeches from some of the assembled notables.

They not only gave Joe a present, but also gave him presents to bring back to England for Maggie's family.

It was overwhelmingly obvious from the formal speeches and the informal conversations that the provision of this well has made a vast improvement to the lives of the people of Sambajang Bessu. They now have clean drinking water as well as a reliable water source for their plants and animals. It is a fitting tribute that a woman who made such a difference to people's lives during her life continues to make a difference after her untimely death.

A touching post-script was provided by a late donation from Angie O'Callaghan, given after the well was completed, which was spent on an orchard of fruit trees close to Maggie's Well and the majestic boabab tree that bears the memorial plaque.



The inscription on Maggie's Well is from Liza & Henry, written by her son Joe and recorded by her on her final album **Won't You Come Away**

## Gill Nelson of Walbottle School writes

My husband, Shaun, and I work for a high school on the outskirts of Newcastle called Walbottle Campus. For the last few years we have worked with The Gambian Schools Trust to obtain resources to send over in the container and have raised enough funds to build two libraries in The Gambia.

We are very proud of the fact that we raised enough money to build a library at Kanalai in 2013, and this year donated enough money to build a library for Kunkujang Upper Basic School and the installation of piped water for Naata Nursery School.

We travelled to Gambia at Easter and were honoured to be invited to the grand opening of the new library. We were treated like royalty with dancers, a drama and everyone in their best finery! It was the first time we had seen the library building and it was absolutely beautiful. It was lovely to see the finished product after all the students' hard work raising the money. We are now working on raising money for the same school to transform a classroom into a computer room and have collected around 100 banana boxes full of resources to be distributed by Hilary and Steve on their return to Gambia.

We are continuing to form local contacts with as many schools as we can, also organisations



like Newcastle United and look forward to continuing our work as the unofficial Geordie branch of the trust!