

Shyira Trust/St Luke's Church

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March 2014

At about 3.00 am on Thursday 6th February five members of St. Luke's left Formby bound for Rwanda and the community of Shyira. They were Colin and Margaret Cooke, Allan Hobson and Alan and Irene Powell. They were joined in Amsterdam by Ann Peterken from London and in Kigali by Peggy Lethem, who is presently working with a medical charity in Uganda.

The group would be in Rwanda for two weeks, and would start with a visit to the National Genocide Memorial then going to Shyira for ten nights before going on to Gisenyi, via Butaka, and then returning to Kigali for the journey home.

When the group arrived in Shyira it was quite late and the lights were still on! The reason was quite simple - Shyira is now connected to the national grid and has an electricity supply. In February the supply was only to the hospital and Groupe Scolaire de Shyira, a secondary school. In the parish guest house there was electricity from the hospital, but only for four or five hours a night. When a meter has been fitted the supply will be all day and night.

A brief report of each day's activities was posted on the Trust's facebook page, and we know from the statistics we received that many people followed our progress.

Butaka.

Butaka is a remote community at the foot of volcano Karisimbi and close to the border with DRC. Moses, at one time a reader in Shyira, is now responsible for establishing a church in Butaka. With help from St. Luke's he has purchased land and building materials.

The land measures 25m by 45m and the church building will be 29m long by 10m wide. A pastors house will also be built. The cold wind coming off Karisimbi can be very strong and potentially damaging to the iron roofing sheets to be used in the construction of the church. It will be necessary to align the building to minimise the risk of damage.



Child-headed families.

16 child-headed family homes have now been constructed, two in the past year. When we started the rebuilding programme the children were generally quite young, but are now mostly teenagers. The young people are very grateful for the help given to them. We are now moving beyond Shyira to help young people over a wider area.

Children's Centre.

Shyira has up to 400 children available to attend church and Sunday School each week, although usually only about 300 will be present on any particular Sunday. They normally go out from church for their own teaching, and in the past would meet under trees, providing it was not raining. Could we help by providing a children's centre for use on Sunday and throughout the week, we were asked.

Starting with two Lent projects and continuing with support through the trust, including one significant gift, the children's centre has been built at a cost of about £20,000. The building work was carried out by a young man trained at the CEFOPS technical school. Village children had chosen the colour scheme. A plaque stating that the centre is a gift from members of St. Luke's and supporters of the Shyira Trust is to be fixed on the wall.

The centre has three main rooms, two of which are separated by a folding partition. There is a small store room and an office. The building is wired for electricity so that it may be used in the evening.

The centre was opened on Sunday 16th February 2014 by Bishop Augustin Ahimana assisted by Noël Kanamugire, Executive Secretary of Shyira Sector and Allan Hobson of the Shyira Trust. Several other local leaders were present. Prior to the opening each of the approximately 400 children present had been blessed individually by Bishop Augustin. The picture shows a children's choir and many more children present at the opening.



The children's centre will be used for Sunday School and for children's activities throughout the week. These will include some of the children's favourite pastimes - singing and dancing. It is also planned to offer literacy courses to parents when children are in school. We shall continue to offer support as the use of the centre develops.

Coffee Growing.

Coffee growing has potential to lift the people of Shyira out of the extreme poverty that we know to be rampant among them. A total of 50,000 plants is required to generate the necessary income. At present some 8,500 plants have been planted over two locations—around the sides of the sports field are 800 plants with the remainder on a hillside about three miles from Shyira.

The 800 plants are producing beans and generating some income, but a near disaster has befallen the others. In the heavy rains of two years ago a road at the top of the slopes was badly damaged and repairs to the road have resulted in large amounts of rock and other debris falling down across the coffee fields. While some compensation is payable the project has been set back by a few years.

Maternity Hospital.

All our supporters will know that the Maternity hospital we provided and Rotary equipped has, with the midwives whose training we paid for, become popular with women. That follows from a big reduction in deaths of both mothers and babies and from the health education given through the 15 health centres the hospital is responsible for.

There is a government drive for higher quality of services. As an example, the hospital had nurses and midwives graded A1 and A2 but now all nurses and midwives must be A1. The government is providing three year university courses for A2 staff who qualified in Rwanda to retrain. They can opt to be a nurse or a midwife after retraining. That has helped the maternity hospital to have four midwives.

The maternity building was designed for 24 patients but the regulations have now changed so that it can only accommodate 12 patients in its five rooms. Patients come in various categories that must be accommodated separately: Normal deliveries, caesarean deliveries, mothers who have lost a baby and mothers who arrive up to a week before their due date because of the difficult terrain they must cross. The accommodation is clearly in need of upgrading. At a meeting held in the Bishop's office it was agreed that the hospital director and Fidel, a midwife, would consider what is required by the present regulations and hospital usage, and would work with architects in the UK and Rwanda to produce a plan for a new building or extension.

We shall then need to consider carefully how we can help because the work will be expensive. Possibly something for discussion at the Trust AGM on 8th June.

Secondary schools.

Groupe Scolaire de Shyira is now in its third year as a day school, although it still manages to arrange boarding for a very few needy students. The change to day school was to reduce fees by removing the boarding element of the cost. However, students prefer to board because that allows them more time to study and gives them a better chance in national exams for entry to university. For that reason students try to leave Groupe Scolaire at the end of year 3 to go to a boarding school. It was interesting to see that a financial gift from Range High is to be used, at the students' request, to buy supervision in the evening to allow extra study time.

The school has requested permission to go back to boarding, but has been told it must have male accommodation on site and that all dormitories must be improved first. Another example of the government drive for better quality.

ACEC, a school not supported by the government, continues to be a boarding school and is now thriving. That is quite a change from the past when it had been a struggling school.

The technical school, CEFOPS, gave us some cause for concern. It has suffered changes in national curriculum and in leadership and seems to have lost its way.

Fanissa's wedding

Fanissa came to Formby three years ago, spending quite a lot of time in Range High School. Her wedding to Gaston had been arranged to coincide with our visit to Shyira.

The wedding extended over two days and was in some ways similar to a wedding here, but in other ways it was very different. The proceedings started Friday morning with a civil ceremony, after which Fanissa and Gaston were legally married. The real proceedings could then begin.

First there was the dowry ceremony. This took place in Shyira on Friday afternoon and was interesting theatre. Two men, one from each family, negotiated over the dowry with the eventual agreement that the bride could be paid for with a cow. The cow would need several items to care for it—a hoe, used as a spade, for planting grass and a sickle for harvesting it are two examples. Eventually two men, one from each family, were sent to select a cow from a fictitious herd. On their return they reported on the excellent cow in song and dance. Gaston had been present throughout the negotiations, and now Fanissa was able to enter the hall.

The following day there was a church wedding. It took place in Musanze Catholic Cathedral and was one of a series of weddings on that day. To us the service was unusual because three couples were married in the same ceremony.

Photographs of the big day are essential for any newly married couple and we went to a small town centre park for photographs to be taken. The picture alongside shows the bride and groom with their bridesmaids and best men. We were included in some pictures.



The final event of the day was a reception in a church hall. It was very different to what may be expected here. Many people in the hall were there simply as spectators, although some were carrying gifts. After several speeches people around the bride and groom were invited to have some food and the cakes were cut. There were several cakes coloured to match the bridesmaids dresses. A firework was lit on one before they were cut and distributed. A nice touch was the giving of a cake to each of their mothers by the bride and groom.

Fanissa and Gaston then received gifts from their guests, after which we left to go back to Shyira for the opening of the children's centre the next day.

Concert.

On Friday May 2nd (Date to be confirmed) Amadeus Choir and Margaret Cooke's cousin Paul Smith, a bass/baritone soloist, will be giving a concert in aid of the Shyira Trust.

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