

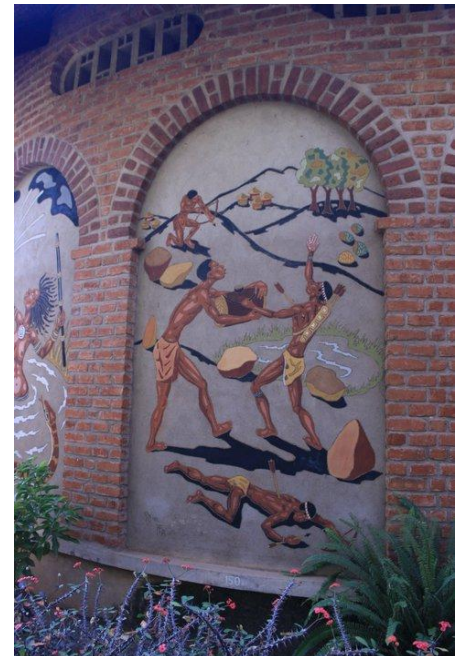
## Malawi trip 2011

Last year, I was told of an opportunity to travel to Malawi with my school Bishop Ramsey, to visit the secondary school our school supports for a cultural exchange. I jumped at the opportunity to visit one of the poorest countries in the world to gain an insight into a place which is completely different to England.



The trip was open to all 6<sup>th</sup> form students in the school and we had 27 people including 3 teachers attending. We gathered at Heathrow airport on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011, each of us not sure what to expect in Malawi. We had been told in brief about Malawi by the teachers who had been 2 years previously but nothing prepared me for the reality of it.

After 24 hours travelling we arrived at kamuzu international airport in the capital city Lilongwe. Having heard Lilongwe was the capital city I expected it to have some high rise buildings and fancy looking office blocks, but all we saw was a quite run down looking airport with fields and trees surrounding it. Once we packed our suitcases and the 27 of us (in a way that would not have been legal in England,) into the 2 hired minibuses we set off for the Kungoni Cultural Arts Centre in the Mua Mission. A



3 hour bus journey from the airport.

Once arriving at Kungoni we were greeted by complete darkness. This darkness was one of many power cuts we were to experience during our stay. We sat down for a delicious dinner of rice and goat (I had rice and fried egg being vegetarian.) after finishing we were all shocked when we were made aware that all 27 of our meals had been cooked using one outdoor stove about 30cm long due to the power cut and somehow they managed to be delivered relatively all together.



After dinner we went to our chalets. They seemed quite luxurious to begin with, but after a while we could tell we were in Africa. I was sharing a chalet with Kirsten and we were both nodding off to sleep when Kirsten realised the light needed turning off. She turned it off but tripped over her suitcase. After tripping over she turned the light back on and suddenly a bat started flapping around the room. Immediately we jumped out of bed. However, as we were running round the room panicking, another shock came. A 3 inch long 1 cm wide praying mantis bug was crawling into my bed....it's safe to say that at this point I was missing England very much! The next day we went for breakfast and watched the local villagers collecting water in the river. We then had a quick

tour of the arts centre where our guide explained 3 of the tribes in Malawi, the Mao, Ngoni and the Chewa and their differences in beliefs and traditions. After the tour, our teachers took us into the local village where we were



followed by a number of children. We played football with a bag full of bags tied together with an elastic band which the children had made, and took many photos of the children which amazed them as they could see themselves on the screen. Ordinarily they would have been at the school funded by the Mua mission but it was the 6<sup>th</sup> of July which is Malawian Independence Day and therefore a national holiday. When we were leaving one of the children asked one of the people in our group for a pen and she gave it to

him, however next thing we knew, we had about 15 children all asking for pens. We gave out all the pens we had, but soon ran out. However, we were humbled when we told them that they had to share and they said a very heartfelt thank you to us.

We set off for the Chilema ecumenical lay training centre in the Zomba district later that day. It was a further 3 hour drive from Kungoni and it was here that we would spend the majority of the trip. The centre runs workshops and trains women on how to run their villages better by teaching them housework so they can return to their villages with knowledge which they can pass on to the other women. The rooms here were a lot more basic than at Kungoni, and were in a hostel-like set up, but seemed bug free (although we were armed with cockroach spray in each room). After having freezing cold showers and unpacking, we sorted out the donations brought over as we were going to the primary school in the morning and many of the donations went there. Other places we sent the donations to were; The Mothers Union in Malawi, the Bishop of Upper Shire (Chilema is in this Diocese), a local nursery, a school for the blind, St Luke's hospital and Malosa Secondary School.

The visit to the primary school was one of the highlights of the trip. As we turned into the road, the children's eyes lit up at the sight of a bus, they all then surrounded the bus eager to meet us. When we came out we noticed that the children had made a fire in the playground. We waited for them to be told off by a teacher for a breach of health and safety, but they weren't. It didn't take long to realise that the children in Malawi are not mollycoddled as they are here. Children as young as 5 were walking in the dark for 2 hours each morning and evening by themselves just to attend school. After having been crowded by the children for about 15 minutes and taking photos with them, the headmaster rang the school bell. As soon as the children heard the bell they ran to line up and sing their school song. We were all shocked to see the amount of respect the children had for their teachers



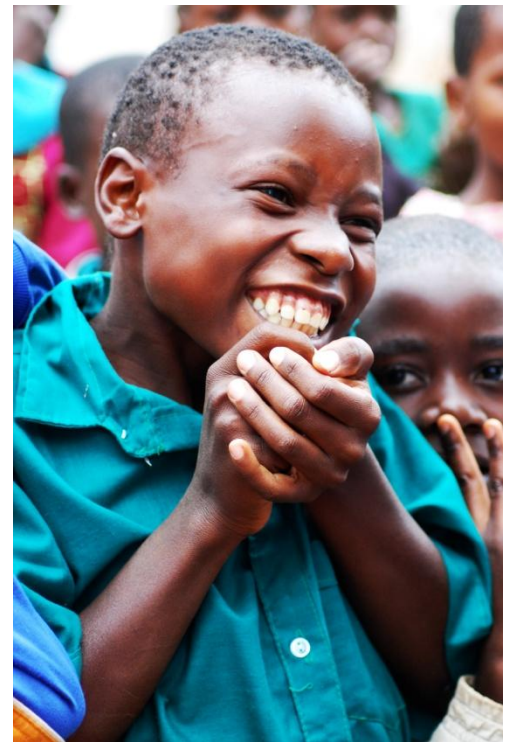


and their education. The headmaster then sent them into their classrooms and we were free to drop in and out of the classrooms as we wished.

I was not prepared for the lack of equipment the primary school had. The classrooms were literally just rooms with quite dingy lighting and a blackboard. The children sat on the floor in a circle for their lessons as there were no tables. Because it was the end of the school year the children had quite a relaxed day and we were invited to play games with them. However, lack of equipment meant the

teacher had to go outside and collect rocks from the ground and we spent a good half hour playing games with these rocks, hitting them on the floor and passing them to each other as quickly as possible. Instead of boredom on the children's faces they were smiling and laughing.

After learning the games that they play we taught them typical English games such as "heads shoulders knees and toes", Conga lines and the "Hokey Kokey". The Hokey Kokey in particular they enjoyed when it came to running into the middle as it turned into a large mass of children running aimlessly.



After the fun and games with the children, we went to get the gifts from the van to give to the school. We had bags and bags. When we were sorting through we thought was a lot but when it was all put out in front of us we realised how much equipment a school needed. However, the head teacher was extremely grateful for the gifts and said that no words could express his gratitude. This reduced many in our group to tears as we realised how a few colouring books and pens really helped the people out there.

*To be continued...*