

## Malawi trip 2011

After visiting the primary school, we made our way to Malosa Secondary school, a private boarding school with approximately 470 students. The school was about a ten minute walk from the Chilema centre. The government changed the term times earlier that year so the school was actually closed for the summer by the time we arrived. However, about 30 third year students (equivalent of year 11 in England) had been asked to stay an extra 2 weeks to welcome us; also the fourth year students who were studying for their Malawian certificate of education. This is the equivalent of A levels and determines which of the students can progress to one of the four universities in Malawi. We had been instructed to go up to the students and speak to them and at first we were wary of doing so. This is because students in England would not be so friendly if strangers came up and spoke to them, but the students put us at ease and they were all very friendly.

We then went into the hall for lunch. We had to wash our hands in a bowl whilst a teacher from the school poured water over our hands. Our teachers and the Malosa teachers were then invited to help themselves to food, then the Bishop Ramsey students, then the Malosa students. It proved to us how much respect Malawians have for their guests and their elders. The food was rice and chicken and Nsima (a starchy dough-like flavourless food made out of Maize flour- the staple food of Malawi). I however just had rice and Nsima. The teachers at Malosa thought it was odd that I didn't pick up any chicken (being vegetarian) and so brought over some salad for me to take. However, we were told by our teachers not to touch the salad there as it was possibly washed with contaminated water. I felt very rude! However I didn't want to take food I wasn't going to eat as food is a lot harder to gather in Malawi. I told my teachers my worries of appearing rude to the Malawians for being vegetarian and not wanting to appear fussy. However, they told me to tell them my views and why I don't eat meat as it was a cultural exchange for both us and the Malawians.

After lunch I was shown round by a girl at the school. She told me her mother died (and later told Kirsten it was due to witchcraft, which is still believed by many Malawians) and her father had gone to find work so she lived with her grandmother. I asked her if she was looking forward to going home but she said no and told me her home life wasn't good. I didn't want to push her into speaking about it, but the women in Malawi are treated as second class citizens and abuse is a common occurrence in women and children.

We were then shown the dam which provides water for the whole of Uppershire. This included the school,

the hospital, the village and Chilema. I was shocked at the amount of water expected to provide for the vast area of land. The girl touring me round explained it is always a worry that the dam will run out of water. We were then shown the allotments where the food is grown for the students.





After looking at the allotments we were taken to the boys dormitories by the assistant head boy called Matthew. Each dorm was named after a Greek civilisation. There was Troy, Athens, Rome and Sparta. I was shocked at the conditions of the dorms. The windows were all broken, the walls discoloured and peeling and the beds broken. However, Matthew spoke of how proud he was of his dorm and how it was a lot better than his bedroom at home. Only a handful of the beds had mosquito nets as it was only the students whose families could afford them who had them. The bathrooms in the dorms were bad as well. In the boys dorms they had to make a path out of beds to get to the bathrooms from their rooms as the pipes had burst leaving it flooded.

We then went down to visit the maize machine our school bought for the school 12 years ago which had since broken and couldn't be repaired due to lack of money. After this we headed back to Chilema for dinner. Unfortunately it was dark by the time we got there (the sun rises and falls at 6 every morning and evening without fail) and there was a power cut so we had to eat dinner and operate in darkness. We then had a talk from the local priest who explained the work they do at Chilema and explained the meaning of the word Chilema. Chilema means deformed in Chichewa (the language in Malawi) and he told us about the Chilema tree which is a unique tree where it is unclear where the trunk is as there are many trunks all woven into each other.

The next day we went back up to Malosa to do activity work with the students. We had two long rolls of paper spread across the tables and we had to draw; our families and lives back home, something we are proud of in our country and something we are not proud of. Where our students drew our families, we found that many of the students at Malosa only drew their villages and the houses they live in. We were not sure if this is due to the fact that many of the children at the school had lost members of their families due to diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Malaria. We also found that we couldn't think of many things we were proud of in our country, a very developed country whereas the Malosa students



filled up their entire space of pictures of the mountains, the villages their agriculture and their trees. This proved to us that England is a very materialistic country and although Malawi is poor, the students are very proud of it.

Another thing we realised was when we were writing about what we are not proud of in our country was how feeble our problems in England are compared to in Malawi. We wrote about the government cuts



in services which are far more developed in England than in Malawi such as healthcare, whereas they wrote about famine, drought, deforestation and disease. It made us all realise the problems in England are nothing compared to what they have in Malawi.



More to come...