

TEABAG

NEWSLETTER
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THE EDUCATION AND BOOK APPEAL: GHANA

VISIT TO THE VILLAGE IN MARCH

Andrew (my 19 year old son) and I visited the village of Mankoadze in March during a trip to Ghana to attend a funeral. We were treated to the most excellent hospitality and really enjoyed our stay. The children fell in love with Andrew and followed him around everywhere. The beach became a favourite playground for them all. We spent a lot of time photographing each child to be sponsored.

For those of you new to TEABAG, Mankoadze is an isolated and impoverished village on the coast of the Central Region of Ghana. I first happened upon the village while looking for a quiet place to stop for a swim during a hot day's travelling. Somehow, the children adopted me!

Ghana itself is a heavily indebted poorer nation, which is able to give little support to the many poor regions within the country. The village mostly survives through the hard work of the local fishermen and the incredible efforts of the women of the village who smoke the fish ready for sale. The ability to produce their food through farming is severely restricted by

the great shortage of water. Water is delivered by tanker into the village and is treated as a precious commodity.

Throughout Ghana, the chance of an education is considered a great opportunity. Children go to immense efforts to get themselves into school and work diligently when they are there. The children are taught both in English and their local dialects. The lessons are structured and disciplined; the teachers are conscientious and do a tremendous job considering the lack of facilities.

GIFTS FROM SPONSORS

When we arrived in March, our suitcases were absolutely loaded with cards, letters and gifts from sponsors in England. One little girl, who is sponsored by a family of five girls in London, was totally spoiled by a huge package of gifts. To avoid disappointment, I made sure that I had gifts for every child in the village, some donated and some purchased. I cannot adequately describe the happiness, joy and excitement that these gifts brought to these children. The parents have asked me to bring their sincere thanks back to those of you who have sent something to the children of Mankoadze.

The latest children to become part of our sponsorship scheme, proudly wearing their new uniforms

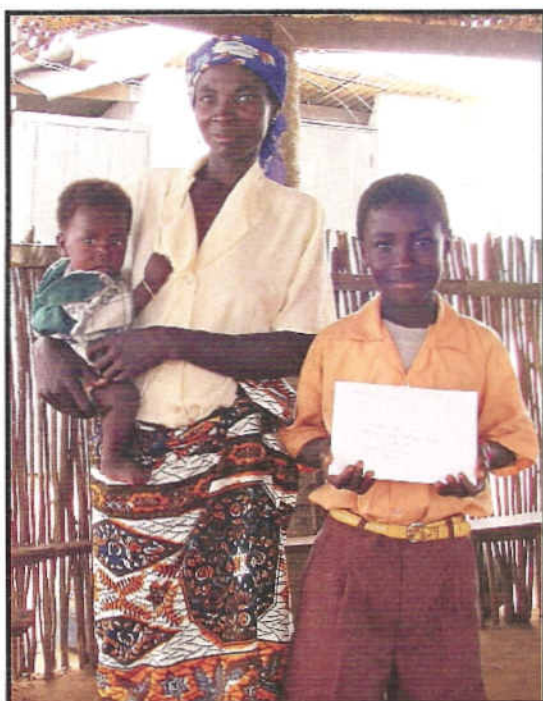




Schoolchildren posing, rather self consciously, in the senior school library

NEWS OF THE BOOK APPEAL AND LIBRARY

Before we left for Ghana, we shipped off 2300 books, along with shoes, clothes, games, toys and a small bicycle. The shipment arrived in Accra during our stay and we were able to make delivery to the village ourselves. The books that we had already sent have been split into two school libraries, one in the junior school building and another with the seniors. The libraries are very well used and much appreciated. The elders of the village would now like to expand the library service to benefit the entire village and have proposed building a village library. Some building materials have already been donated and a suitable site has been found near the school. I will keep you informed of the progress of this project. Once again, I would like to thank all those who have helped by donating books. The books open up a whole world for the people.



One of the children receiving his letter from a sponsor in England

DISAPPOINTMENTS

As in all ventures, nothing is ever without small disappointments: of the sponsored children, around 60 of them have never been to school before. Unfortunately, one boy of about 12 years found that he couldn't settle into the educational system and decided not to continue at school. Another disappointment was that one of our 28 boxes of books disappeared sometime between being unloaded from the container and being packed into our hired van, another box had some toys stolen from it. In the overall scheme of things, these disappointments can be viewed as fairly minor, albeit frustrating!

CHILDREN'S BICYCLES

I hate to be always on the scrounge, but I am looking for children's bicycles to send to the village. The two that I have already sent have made a big impact. Both of them belonged to children in London who had long outgrown them and they were rusting in garden sheds. I gave them a good service, fixed the brakes and polished them back to a gleaming condition. I guess any child anywhere in the world is going to be excited by getting a bike, but the delight shown on the face of a poor African child is beyond compare. If you have a child's bicycle going begging, give me a call and I will collect it from you and give it a new lease of life.

SPONSORSHIP NEWS

The original aim was to find sponsors for 20 children. People in England were asked to donate £10 to pay for the education of one child for one year. The amount seems so small to us in the affluent West but is a huge sum to families living in a level of poverty that we find difficult to contemplate. Around half of the children of Mankoadze had never had the opportunity to go to school. TEABAG is now supporting 114 children, although sponsors are still sought for nearly 30 of them. As promised, every penny donated has gone directly to benefit the children. I am covering all the administration, currency and shipping costs. Accounts are kept in London and in the village.

The biggest costs have been the provision of the school uniforms. £6.50 for the girls and £6.00 for the boys. Initially, we tried to support the local seamstress who made the first 20 outfits. She was unable to handle the increased workload and the remaining uniforms were purchased in the capital (Accra). The school fees have been paid for the 2002 educational year, although a few of the very youngest children will be starting school in September.

I am delighted to report that Goose Green Primary School in East Dulwich have decided to sponsor one child per class. The children of Goose Green are undertaking their own fund raising events and plan to keep in contact by sending letters to Ghana.



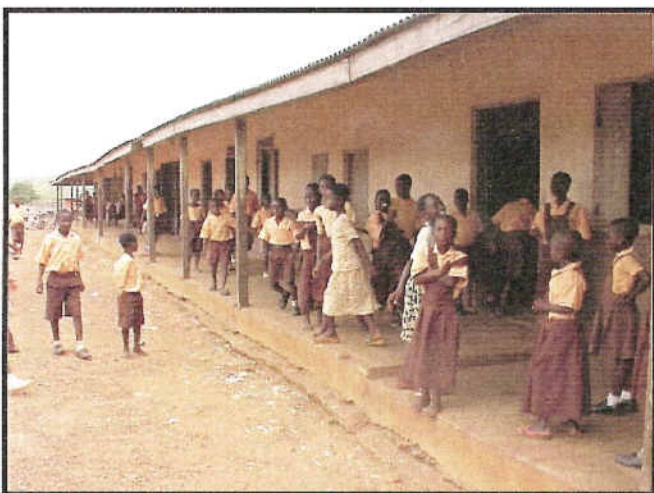
This photo shows the infants class, in the foreground is Ebenezer Otwe. Described locally as a cripple, we would call him disabled, Ebenezer always has that broad smile plastered across his face. He cannot straighten his right leg and is unable to walk. He still manages to get to school everyday. We are still seeking a sponsor for Ebenezer.

CHARITY STATUS?

At the moment, TEABAG is a private charity. Several people have suggested that it should become a registered charity. I am slightly frightened by the paperwork and bureaucracy that it would bring. I have tried to open a bank account in the name of the charity but have found that it would need to be registered before that can happen. If anyone has any advice, or would like to become the secretary of the registered charity, I would be glad to hear from you. In the meantime, I am afraid that the cheques will need to be made payable either to Roger Gillman or Gillman Funeral Service.

THANKS TO ORGANISATIONS

Oxfam at Wallington, for donating shoes, clothes and books
Rotary Club of Tooting, for a cash donation
Nick and Martin of Slideshow, for printing this newsletter free of charge
Ron Hooper of RAH shipping for sending all those books
TOBAR toy wholesalers for selling me toys and games at wholesale prices
SAIF (National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors) for a whole page appeal in their magazine



The photo above shows some of the parents of the sponsored children. They made a special trip to see us to thank us for helping their children. Those thanks are actually due to **YOU**; the kind people who have agreed to sponsor their children. I understand that there was scepticism when we first spoke to them about the sponsorship scheme back in May last year, although I wasn't aware of it at the time. I think that other NGOs had visited the village in the past and promised help but it was never forthcoming. Once people of the village saw children going to school for the first time and wearing new uniforms, they really started to believe that someone was interested in them. Following that point, many more families came forward asking for their children to be considered for the scheme.

The picture on the left shows one of the three main school buildings. The school day starts very early and the children here are having their morning break.



SPORTS EQUIPMENT APPEAL

To say that the children are sports mad would be an understatement. There was great excitement during our visit when a school from Apam (a much larger town along the coast) sent their football and netball teams along to play the Mankoadze teams. Although they had the home advantage, "our children" did fantastically well. The boys beat Apam 4 - 2 and the girls thrashed their opponents 12 - 0! During the football practice, Andrew saw that the boys had to stop playing every 10 minutes to inflate their only football. It looked like it had been serving the football team for 20 years! During our visit to Kumasi, Andy bought a new ball for them and presented to the football coach.

Andrew has decided to ask if anyone has children's football boots that their own children have outgrown. These would be a fantastic bonus to the budding Ghanaian footballers. Just like the books, these boots could be dropped off at any of our branches.