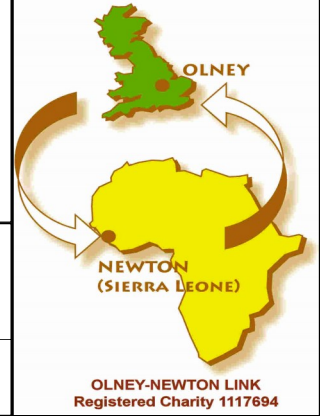


Olney—Newton Link



“To advance education and to relieve poverty

in the village of Newton, Sierra Leone, by the provision of charitable assistance”

July 2024

www.olneynewtonlink.org.uk

ONL

Keeping Africa Healthy: Life aboard a Mercy Ship



Una Wilkinson, who volunteers as a nurse on Mercy Ships



One of the Mercy Ships

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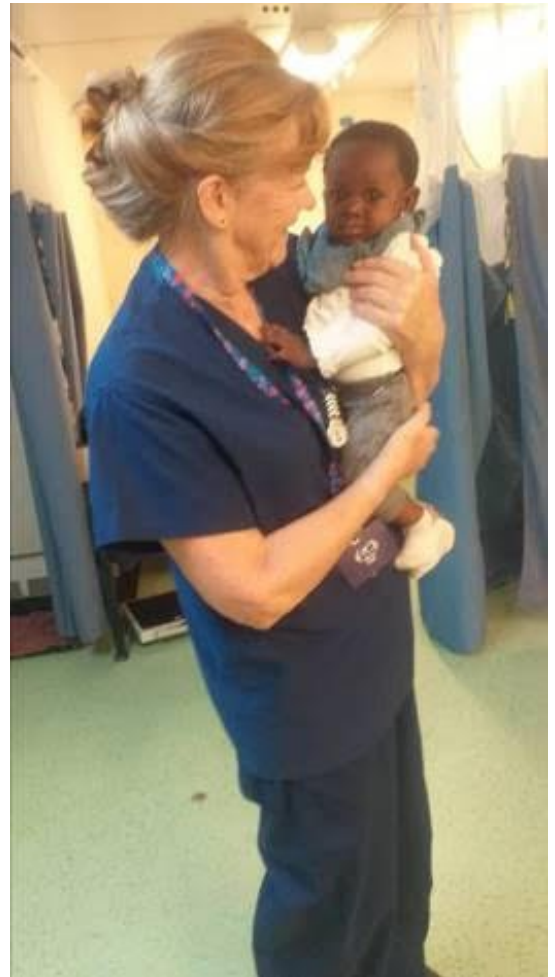
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Keeping Africa Healthy: Life aboard a Mercy Ship

Our speaker at the AGM was to be Una Wilkinson, a nurse who works on Mercy Ships. Sadly, at the last minute, she was unable to attend due to a postponed family funeral in Scotland. Our Chair, Anne, spoke instead, using Una's information and her presentation to illustrate her words.

Mercy Ships have undertaken 114,000 life saving procedures in the last year, thanks to trained professionals who volunteer to work with them. There are currently two ships (Global Mercy and Africa Mercy) based in Madagascar and Sierra Leone with between 400 and 600 volunteers on board each. Modern hospital ships bring world-class volunteer medical professionals directly to the places they're needed most. Their ethos is that everyone deserves the opportunity to live a full and healthy life, underpinned by the motto 'bringing hope and healing'



Una with a young crew member!

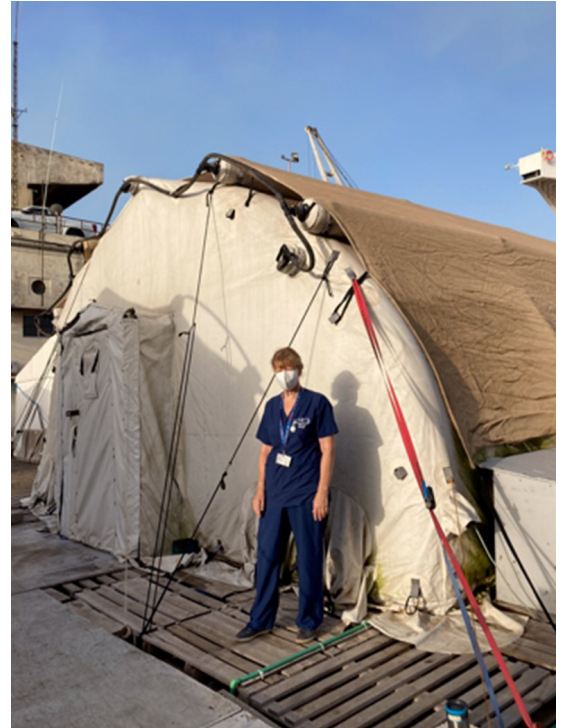


Treating an eye condition

In the 42 years of the existence of Mercy Ships, 3 million people have been treated by thousands of volunteers from all over the world, focusing on health problems such as rickets, cleft lip and skin tumours. They provide services to Africa where 70% of the world's poorest live. Mercy Ships also train local healthcare workers. They welcome healthcare workers as volunteers and they also need teachers, photographers, cooks, receptionists, mechanics, IT specialists, engineers, cleaners and maritime crew. Una has been serving with them for 12 years.



Una with colleagues



The out patients department—a tent on the dock!

Una is away for 6 to 8 weeks at a time. She described celebrating Burns Night and being given a farewell presentation at the end of her last tour. Una has to keep working here in the UK too in order to keep up to date and maintain her qualifications.

Thank you, Una, for providing a very interesting presentation for us—we are very grateful that you did so at a difficult time for you and your family.

There is a very interesting video to watch on the Mercy Ships website mercyships.org.uk about Uma, a little girl from Sierra Leone, who suffered with a huge tumour. In June, following a productive year of conducting close to 2,000 complimentary surgeries in Sierra Leone, Mercy Ships departed Freetown for a short maintenance period.

The Vessel is scheduled to resume its mission in the country in August, offering free surgeries and additional services for another year upon its return.



Global Mercy arriving in Freetown

AGM 2024: The Chair's Report



Last year, Sierra Leone was awaiting a General Election. This meant that we had little communication from our Newton Committee, as many of the members were involved in political campaigning.

The election took place last June, amid controversy and claims of electoral malpractice from the opposition party. Unfortunately, this culminated in a failed coup and rioting in late November. The Government imposed a curfew from the 12th to 20th of December to deal with the problem.

Newton was not directly affected by the riots, but some parents refused to send their children to school, because they were frightened for their safety. No doubt the unrest evoked memories of the bloody Civil war that ended in January 2002. During the war, Newton was devastated. Many people were murdered, or maimed, children were kidnapped and forced to join the rebel army.

We have, still, had little or no communication from the Newton Committee and no answers to our outstanding questions about the repairs to the water wells and the current status of the former Preschool.

The economic situation has continued to worsen, causing major hardship. Increased costs are reflected in the cost of materials, fuel for transport, as these have to be imported. Inflation has now reached 46%! The Government have been unable to meet the charges for electricity, supplied by a Turkish Company ship, moored off shore. Karpowership, which converts gas to electricity to feed the national grid, cut the electricity supply from 60 megawatts to 6 megawatts, last month, because it was owed £48m. Part of this amount was paid, so some improvement has resulted. As most of Newton is not on mains electricity, the effects are felt indirectly, but it has caused issues for hospitals and shops, especially, those with fridges and freezers.

Luckily, we have been able to continue to support the building of the new Community Centre, in Kpoubu, which is overseen by Brima James Kabia, the local Baptist Pastor and his fellow community members. Brima is completely apolitical, so our communications with him were unaffected by the election and its aftermath. We sent funds for the walls, as requested, and have offered assistance with funding the roof. This project is a major commitment. Consisting of a large, two storey building, with a separate kitchen building, a water well (hopefully, with a water tank incorporating a filtration unit) and fitted with solar panels to produce electricity, linked to storage batteries, it will be for the use by all the Kpoubu district community. This is a largely undeveloped area of Newton. It will be used for weddings and celebrations, health and other conferences, meetings and as a Court, among other things. We are assured that it will be open to all regardless of tribe, religion, status or political affiliation. This is a worthwhile project, but will be expensive to fund, so your donations, gifts and help with fund raising are essential to enable work to continue. So, thank you to all who have and continue to support us in anyway., either through regular donations or one-off gifts, filling collection boxes, giving your time or items for our stalls or raffle prizes – all are much

Although better healthcare and, in some places, better water supplies, mean average life expectancy has increased to 60 years, 1 in 10 children still die before the age of 5. This is despite free healthcare for children under 5, pregnant women and nursing mothers!

Mosquito nets are free to all, but as they are mainly rectangular in shape, fixing them in place is difficult! Also, medication for malaria is readily available, so people often don't use the nets!

As the population is young, with the median age being 19.3 years, our schools Links are of even greater importance. We are delighted with the growing contact between the Village Federation schools here and Christ Evangelical School in Newton and between Ousedale School and the new Goshen High School.

In line with our policy of trying to assist projects that benefit areas of the community which need our help, we have agreed, in principle, to send funds to assist Goshen High School's re-digging and refurbishing of a water well and the building of a toilet block.

We were particularly encouraged to back this project, as the pupils themselves are actively involved in the work. Giving their labour after school! (I can't get over how immaculate their uniforms are!)

This year we have been given a number of items to send to Newton, including another sewing machine, more uniform, first aid equipment, spectacles, school books (including a large number from Emma Wallace, Head of the Village Federation Schools and some reference books from Oxfam, pens, paper and 20 new Bowling Club shirts. The latter were presented to the teachers at Goshen High School.

I hope that has given you an insight into the Link's work over the last year and our hopes for the future.

Once again, I would like to thank you all for your generosity, your time and support, without which the Link could not continue.

We are always looking for more volunteers to help with events and fund raising, please consider joining us. We are delighted that Events Team has 3 new helpers. There is always room for more! If any of you are able to commit to becoming a Trustee, we would be very grateful – new blood is necessary to keep the Link going. Please give this careful thought.

As always, my grateful thanks go to all our helpers, events team and volunteers, including those who help behind the scenes, with publicity, erecting the gazebo, moving furniture, setting up and clearing up. Finally, my warmest thanks go to my fellow Trustees for their dedication and support, throughout the year.

Anne McCallum



Fundraising

Soup Lunch

On Friday April 15th, our annual soup lunch proved to be 'a great social event where people feel comfortable and welcome' to quote one attendee. The soup is delicious too and so are the cakes and biscuits afterwards. Thank you too all who came and helped raise £510 for the Community Centre.



Some of those who came—and many apologies if I haven't got you in the picture. Thank you Anne and Rob for hosting the event and thank you to all the cooks!

Cherry Fair

Luckily it was a more or less dry day—and not too hot! In fact sometimes not hot enough. But there were plenty of people there and thanks to all of you who generously donated such wonderful gifts we raised £550, an amazing amount!

