

Olney—Newton Link

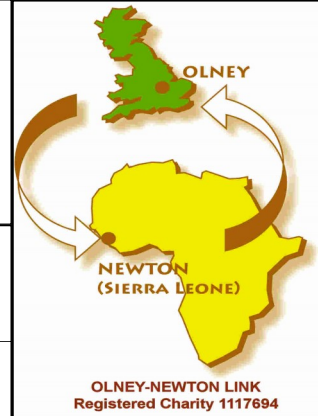
“To advance education and to relieve poverty

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

May 2017

www.olneynewtonlink.org.uk

ONL



The AGM 2017



If you are ever in Freetown, don't be surprised to see young men wearing Saints shirts! Calum Clark, Northampton Saints rugby player explained all at the AGM.

Also in this edition... the Chair's report, Graduation Day at the Institute, news of the PreSchool, pictures of children enjoying the toys we sent, and, of course, reports on our events.

Rugby in Sierra Leone

Calum Clark at the AGM



Calum Clark, Northampton Saints (now Saracens) rugby player has visited Sierra Leone three times. His girlfriend, Katherine, was working there on an NGO project, arranged for Calum to meet Jeremiah, head of Sierra Leone rugby, and told him lots of local lads played rugby on Lumley beach. Calum was shocked to find that despite the lack of a proper pitch and a very rough, littered surface on the beach, they weren't playing touch rugby but the full on hard tackling version.

On his next visit, Calum took brand new kit out for them, courtesy of the Saints. The 50-60 lads, ages ranging from 15 to about 30, were delighted to receive the brand new shirts, still with tags on, a new experience for them. Even second hand boots were appreciated, some playing in sizes way too big for them!

Training took place on the beach, a full vigorous workout despite the heat. Their leader had been instructed in a basic level of rugby and was pleased to receive some more advanced coaching books from Northampton. In their new shirts and sporting red and green bibs for training sessions, the team looked very professional and drew a big audience as passers-by stopped to watch and find out what was going on. Rugby gave the young men an outlet for their emotions and a chance to be part of the club team.



Katherine worked there for 18 months, after the Ebola outbreak. She lived in an old colonial house, and she and Calum enjoyed getting to know the local people and visiting schools. They have kept in touch with one young boy called Lamin, and Calum and his family are supporting Lamin to complete his education. They keep in touch through Whatsapp, which we use all the time too to communicate with Newton, as e mail is unreliable and people have very limited access to it. Lamin's story is not an unusual one – his mother was from Guinea, his father a Salonean – he lives on his own, aged about 16, struggles a bit academically but works hard to keep his place at the Bilingual School. He's joined the rugby team and that gives a focus to his life outside school.



In the 1960/70s there was a thriving national rugby team in Sierra Leone, who played matches against neighbouring countries such as Liberia. Calum went to Freetown National Stadium to meet a man from the Olympic Committee – Rugby 7s is now an Olympic sport – and tried to persuade them to sponsor the sport again. He found the bureaucracy frustrating and spent hours in waiting rooms! It's all such a barrier to progress, and the ONL have experienced similar problems.

Calum is planning to go to Venezuela this year, to help with a scheme where a rum factory owner employs young men on condition they play in his rugby team. The owner finds it makes for a better workforce, giving the men a sense of belonging and greater self-esteem. It's also a way of expressing emotions and a physical outlet for them. Rugby provides rules and values and also confrontation – you have to be brave to make the tackle – so it means fewer problems in everyday life.

Thank you, Calum, for such an interesting and informative talk – we were so pleased to hear about what you are doing in SL and elsewhere – good luck with your future career at Saracens and hopefully you'll keep in touch with the ONL, especially if you visit SL again.



AGM: The Chair's Report

This evening, I would like to talk about some of the Link's achievements over the years.

Most of you will be aware of the history of the connection between Olney and Newton in Sierra Leone. John Newton, who was for some years the Curate of the Parish Church of St Peter and St Pauls, had an earlier career as a slave trader. As such, he went to West Africa, and particularly Sierra Leone, and traded from, and may have lived, on Bunce Island. This was the site of a slave fort, and is close to Freetown. Suffice it to say, he eventually saw the error of his ways, and became a powerful advocate for the abolition of the slave trade.

When freed slaves, settled in the area, now known as Newton, it was felt that his was an appropriate name for the settlement. In more recent times, a link was established between the Parish Church here, and St Marys in Newton, largely through the auspices of Rena Partridge. This friendship was greatly strengthened in 1999, when, during the Civil War in Sierra Leone, the Village of Newton was destroyed, and the people fled. Every house was ransacked, and a third burnt down. Gifts and letters were exchanged, and in January 2002, when the War ended, funds were raised, to enable the building of new houses in Newton. By May 2002, the first 20 houses were completed. In 2003, a group from Olney visited Newton, to review ongoing needs, and the progress that had been made. 2003 saw the beginnings of the Schools link. Of the people visiting Newton, Janet Woolley, both spoke and taught in schools in Newton, covering a wide age range from pre-school, to secondary school. By 2007, the building of the houses was largely completed, and work had commenced on the Skills Training Centre. This work was eventually completed in 2011, and an opening ceremony on a vast scale, took place in September of that year. The S.T.C, re-named The Newton Institute, is now fully functional, and takes students from all around the Newton area, and much further afield. It is affiliated to the University of Sierra Leone. The Institute is oversubscribed, and one possible future project may be an extension, to provide further facilities.

Bakarr, the Principal, would also like to build a medical centre nearby. This would be a huge undertaking and certainly beyond our current resources. As those of you who attended last year will be aware, a Bursary has been put in place, to assist students from the Newton community, to attend. We have received letters of thanks from the first 10 students, who benefitted.

In 2010, and 2011, exchange visits between schools took place. 3 teachers from the schools in Olney and Lavendon, visited Newton in 2010, and in 2011, 3 teachers from Newton came here. This was quite a cultural experience (not to say shock) for all.

The schools link continues to develop. We thank all of the teachers involved, particularly Marilyn Watkins, who is also a Trustee, for their ongoing efforts. In 2012, money was raised to build a community water well. Newton has no piped water, nor any sanitary system of any sort.

Also in 2012, one of our long-term supporters, Sarah Dewey, raised funds to purchase a solar suitcase for the Newton Clinic. This allows maternity care for women living in isolated areas.

In addition, we have raised funds to build toilet blocks, and additional water wells.

During the 2014/2015 Ebola epidemic, money was sent to purchase cleaning supplies, clothing, food, etc. We worked with not only the Newton Committee, but also James (Brima) Kabia, the Baptist Pastor, in Newton, to try to alleviate the suffering of the people affected by Ebola.

Post Ebola, many children were left without one or both parents, or their main carer. As you are aware, our committee in Newton expressed a desire to build a pre-school, to provide day care for children, between the ages of 3-6, allowing their carers to earn enough money to feed them.

This project is now structurally complete. It is already taking care of children, and there are plenty more on the waiting list. Money is still required to complete fitting out, furnishing, etc. In addition, we have been asked for, and sent toys, some collected by local school children.

A water well was also built to serve the Institute, and the Pre-School, which are in close proximity to each other.

Another well is planned. We have already received a donation of £1,500.00 towards the cost of building this, from the Baptist Church, which leaves the other £1,500.00 – any offers?!

We have also raised, or had donated, funds to enable the commencement and continued growth of the pineapple plantation project.

In addition, the Link has, over the years, sent first aid equipment, toys, sportswear and equipment, much of which has been donated by local sports clubs, particularly the Football Club, computers for the Institute and, more recently, spectacles, out to Newton.

The generosity of people in Olney, the surrounding area, and much further afield, has made our work possible. We receive support from many sources, within the Town and in other areas, from our corporate sponsors, the schools, local Churches, particularly the Parish Church and the Baptist Church, the scouting movement, who have a link with the scouts in Newton, the Phonebox, C T Wilson, and many other shops who allow us to display posters, etc. We also are extremely grateful to people who provide us with practical assistance, in the form of help, organising concerts, donating money in the form of sponsorship, or, occasionally, personal bequests.

Most importantly, our work would be pointless, if it were not for our committee in Newton. They advise us of the needs of the local community, and we then raise and send funds to enable them to supply those needs.

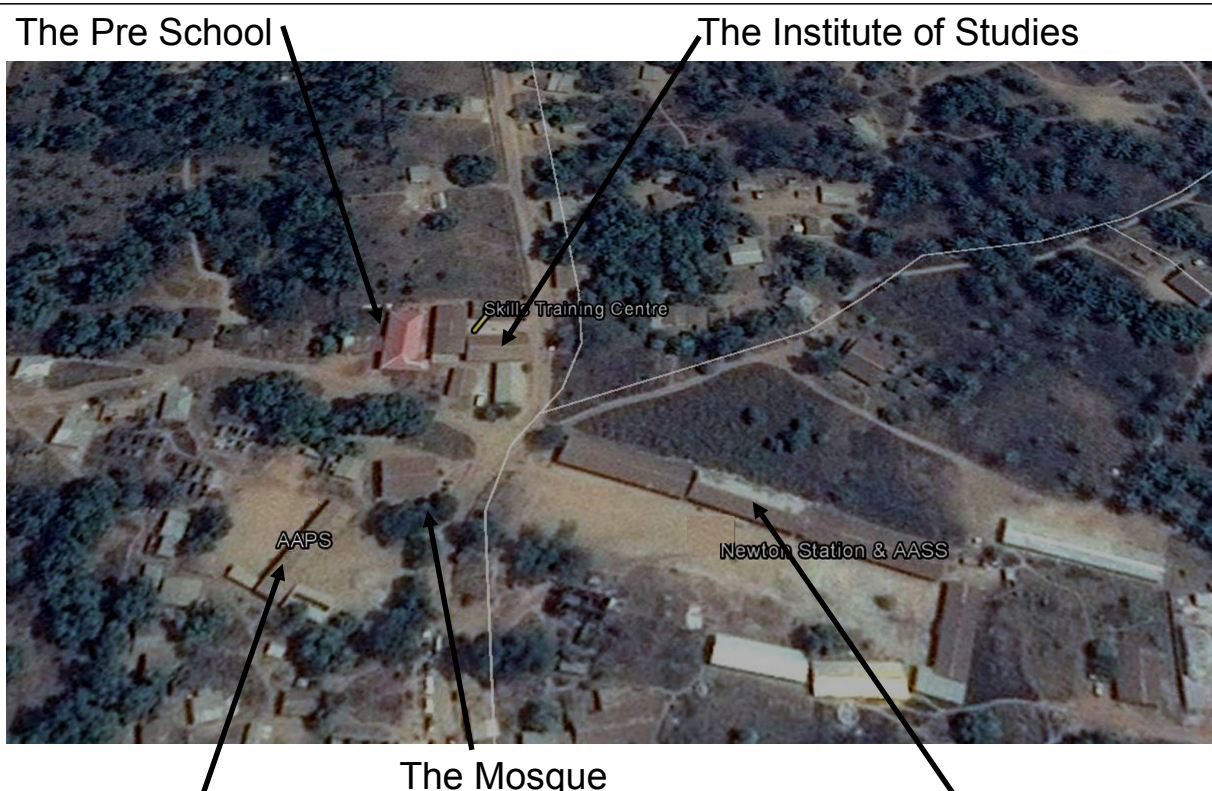
As most of you will know, construction work is not easy in Sierra Leone. Not only does the country suffer from chronic inflation, but there is also a lack of natural resources, resulting in the need to import almost everything. This makes budgeting extremely difficult. In addition, the torrential rains between May and November, result in work becoming impossible. Communication is also extremely difficult, as there is no electricity supply, other than that produced by generators (when they work). This results in limited internet access, (and often none at all). Further, there is no infrastructure in place! For example, the accounts which we receive from our Treasurer of the Newton Committee, come in the form of photos of handwritten accounts!

We are always looking for more helpers, people willing to act as Trustees, or serve on our various committees, and to help man stalls and help with events. If you feel that you would be interested in helping, please speak to one of us. We are interested in hearing from anyone, who might wish to help, even if on a part time basis, with banking and administration, when, for example, one of our officers goes on holiday.

I also want to thank my fellow Trustees for their commitment, enthusiasm and support.

Anne McCallum, Chair, Olney - Newton Link

Newton from the air



The Newton PreSchool

The preschool is open and running, with about 100 children enrolled, a great start!. The building is complete: there is provision for adding another storey if it is ever needed.

The walls have been whitewashed and they have begun to purchase furniture and rugs. Some toys have been sent out from Olney.

The Newton Committee has registered the preschool and is applying for government support to pay the teachers/carers but, as always in Sierra Leone, this all takes time. Trustees have agreed to fund staff salaries for three months in order to allow them to continue whilst official approval is gained.

A report from the Newton Committee at the end of March:

I write to keep you all informed on the recent development of the link here in Sierra Leone. The preschool was formally opened at the beginning of March and uniforms were distributed to the children. According to our treasurer much is not needed to complete this project and we are now working together to produce an end result within the shortest possible time. We have selected two teachers in volunteer service provision, given little compensation by the end of each month. Indeed we have registered a good number of homeless and hopeless children whom we intend transforming and shaping their live for an unimaginable future.



Graduation Day 2017

Taken from a message sent by Abu Bakarr Forfana, Newton Committee

The Institute is doing very well. We have managed to run this institute despite the difficulties facing our country. I am proud to inform you that our students have taken their final year National Diploma and Certificate Exams in Accounting, Banking, Human Resources, Computer Engineering, Building Technology, Public Health and Reproductive Health. What is amazing right now is that some of them now have secure jobs in NGOs, the Police Force and in Private Health Centres. Our official convocation and graduation ceremony was held on the 25th February. This occasion is a true manifestation of our hard work and total commitment.

Below are some of the lovely photographs of Graduation Day. Well done to all the students! And their teachers, of course!



Schools' News

Cartons of books and schools equipment were sent out from Olney and Lavendon to all three link primary schools recently. Unpacking was fun!

Ahmadiyya
Agricultural Primary
School



Christ Evangelical
School



Rural Education
Committee School



Toys for children

James Kabia, Pastor of the Baptist Church in Newton, sent us a plea for toys to be sent out for the children of Newton. As you can see from the photos, they were delighted with them, especially we are told, the 'action' ones!



Pancake Day

Once again, we manned a stall at the Olney Pancake Race. This year, as well as our usual windmills, lucky dip, egg cosies and bunny biscuits, we had an Easter Egg raffle which was a great success. Many thanks to all the donors, including confectionery firm Mars. £89.27 was raised for the link, thank you everyone!



Sue Lynch did lots of the hard (cold) work!

Soup Lunch

Friday March 31st found members of the Events Committee hard at work preparing a choice of delicious soups (spicy tomato, butternut squash, carrot and coriander, pea, mint and spring greens, and chickpea with spinach). There was crusty bread to eat with it and tea, coffee and cakes after. Thank you to those who came—we raised £518 through your generous donations.

Why not join us next year?



A huge thank you to our raffle prize donors, who included:

Amici, Marc Andrew, The Courtyard Brasserie, Beauty Picture House, The Coop and many, many others.

Music of the Night!

Have you bought your tickets yet?

Songs from the Shows,

Bozeat Windmill Singers, at the URC on Saturday 20th May.

Numbers include: Phantom medley, Rhythm of life, 2 songs from Joseph, Love changes everything, Can you feel the love tonight, Pie Jesu, Let it go, Les Miserables medley, A whole new world, Evita medley, Music of the night, Singing in the rain, Raindrops keep falling..., Thank you for the music, West Side Story medley and much more!

Wine, fruit juices and nibbles will be available in the interval and Sarah Dewey will be selling her beautiful handmade cards and crafts. Don't miss it!

Tickets from Wilsons, The Phonebox, or call 01234 711196 or 01234 712540



Songs from the Shows

Bozeat Windmill Singers

Saturday 20th May, 7.30pm

The Cowper Memorial URC, High Street, Olney

Tickets £8: collect from CT Wilson, The Phonebox
or telephone 01234 711196, 01234 712540 or 01234 713745

Refreshments In aid of The Olney Newton Link

FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2017

Saturday 20th May	Songs from the Shows, 7.30pm. URC
Saturday 17th June	Cherry Fair
Saturday 15th July	BBQ at 34 Carey Way, Olney
Friday 10th November	Quiz, at The Olney Centre.

More details can be found on our website: www.olneynewtonlink.org.uk

CORPORATE MEMBERS SCHEME

We are fortunate to receive support from local businesses, both financial and practical. Corporate members sponsor the Link's work through a series of packages:

Bronze Membership, £100 per annum – Benefits:- your website link and name on ONL's website.



Silver Membership, £150 per annum – Benefits:- your website and name and description on ONL's website and your company name and logo in our newsletter.

Gold Membership, £200 per annum – Benefits:- your website name and link and profile (maximum 30 words) on ONL's website and listing as sponsor in newsletter and logo.

Platinum Membership, £500 per annum - Benefits; link, profile (maximum 200 words) on ONL website, logo and advert carrying their logo in newsletter

Our very grateful thanks to those who have already joined the scheme—**Ashwood Chimneys, David Coles, Heron Opticians, J Garrard & Allen, Souls Garages and Stephen Oakley.**

GOLD

	Ashwood Chimneys is a professional, highly accredited, family run company based in Olney which undertakes and specialises in all aspects of chimney works within the Beds, Bucks and Northants area.
	David Coles Architects
	J Garrard & Allen , Solicitors, has been established for over 200 years. The firm has a local and international clientele. We like to provide a friendly, efficient and prompt service to our clients, many of whom have been with us for years. The firm is pleased to sponsor the Link's work. For more details of the areas of law covered by the firm, please view the website— www.jgalaw.co.uk
	Heron Opticians a friendly, professional family business.
	Stephen Oakley
	Souls Garages

SILVER

BRONZE

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