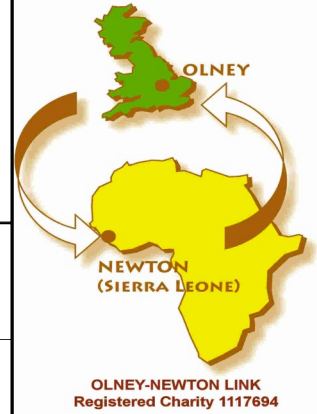


Olney—Newton Link



“To advance education and to relieve poverty

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

June 2026

www.olneynewtonlink.org.uk

ONL

OLNEY-NEWTON LINK
Registered Charity 1117694

Sports Day at Goshen High School



Thank you to Headteacher Abdul Kabia for these lovely photos! Sports Day is always a big occasion in Sierra Leone. Which team do you think won?



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 For the newsletter e mail:
olneynewtonlinknewsletter@gmail.com

The AGM 2026

Our speaker - Binta Bah Pokawa



Our speaker this year was Binta Bah Pokawa, a Sierra Leonean who came to the UK as a young bride. She is a Newport Pagnell Town Councillor and was formerly a Civil Servant in the Home Office. Binta is very proud of bringing all cultures together in a festival in Newport Pagnell from Scottish to Sierra Leonean!

Like other developing countries in non-Saharan Africa, Sierra Leone is growing. It was granted independence from Britain 65 years ago. Most of the leaders in West Africa were educated at Fourah Bay College where Tony Blair's father was a lecturer. Sierra Leone's First Lady has visited Milton Keynes. Binta regards herself as a 'velvet glove' feminist and she is keen to see more women leaders in Sierra Leone. It was taboo in Sierra Leone to talk about women's health issues (the menopause was regarded as witchcraft) and Binta has tried to speak out whenever possible including chiding a committee for addressing the meeting as 'gentlemen'.



Binta was born in East Kenema and went to school in Kenema City. She still has family there. Most Sierra Leonean women get married at 14 or 15 and she was the first in her family to marry out of the tribe - she feels very strongly that it is wrong for 14 year olds to be married off to 60 year old men. She is pleased that thanks to their outspoken First Lady Female Genital Mutilation is now illegal unless the woman is over 18 but she is concerned that it may still be happening in the villages. Her husband's tribe was Mende and she remembers being scared of the devil masks worn by priests - now she knows better.

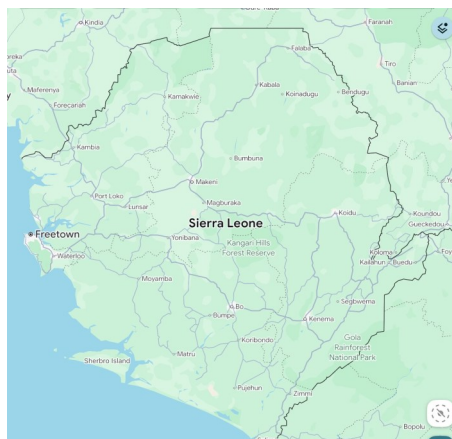
She was delighted to tell us that she had just been elected chief of her tribe/town in Jericho, near Kenema in Sierra Leone. Landowners married more than 1 wife to gain more land. Binta and her late husband funded legal action to save Jericho and stop land being taken away. Her husband wanted her to become chief and when he died, following elections, his wishes were carried out. Recently some Chinese went to the village to extract a rare tree (in exchange for building a paved road) but Binta has now decreed that no one should come into the village without her permission.

Binta is planning to go to Jericho in December and many of her colleagues wish to visit to see her coronation. She is their first chief to be elected in absentia and she is chief for life - the title should then pass to her eldest son and his children. As chief, she has to settle conflicts and adjudicate on crimes and land disputes. She is working to get local crafts to return - making clothes and basketwork. She wants them to use their land to feed themselves and avoid visiting the city to purchase basics like peppers, onions, cassava and potato leaves (similar to the 'farming basket' scheme the ONL supported). Palm oil is a lucrative crop. Knowledge of farming is being lost but it still exists in the community so it can be regenerated.

The tradition in Sierra Leone is for families to be mixed and religions are respected and not discriminated against - Mustafa may be Christian and Mark Muslim. Much of Sierra Leone is uninhabited- about 90%- and people are being encouraged to move away from Freetown back to the countryside. Binta's eldest son has begun to grow bamboo on 10 acres of land in Jericho - it's a very useful crop for making items from scaffolding to bikes!

Binta is keeping in touch with Jericho people through the use of WhatsApp groups, which works well. Recently there has been some development with the use of radio too. Her ambition is to link all the Jerichos in the world with the one in Sierra Leone and she has made a start with Jericho in Oxford!

Thank you Binta for a very entertaining and informative talk and we would like to wish you every success in your new role as Jericho's chief. We look forward to hearing how you are getting on in a few years' time.



Chair's Report 2026



Welcome to our annual meeting and thank you for making the effort to attend. Thank you, again, to Binta for her fascinating talk.

Thank you to all our supporters, financial, practical and moral – without you the Link couldn't continue. Every one of you is much appreciated.

Thank you to the Events Committee and additional helpers- without whom much of our fundraising wouldn't happen- those who help behind the scenes, setting up, taking down, clearing away, cooking and baking, providing technical and audio support, manning stalls, serving food, selling raffle tickets etc.

Thank you to all the trustees and their families who also get involved, and often wear 2 hats! Your help and support are very much appreciated.

Thank you to our enthusiastic local link schools, who work so hard to raise funds for their Newton link schools.

Finally, a big thank you and, very sadly, goodbye to our Northern Branch. Sarah and David Dewey have worked tirelessly for the Link for many years. They have, reluctantly, decided that it is time to sever the link and move on to support other charities nearer to them. I would like to thank them for their much-appreciated contribution over the years and to wish them every success in the future.

Please remember that we are always looking for new people to join us, in whatever capacity you would like – please talk to one of our trustees or helpers or, phone me, for more information on what is involved. (07375 425325).

This year, I also want to thank our retiring Treasurer, Tricia Selwood, who has decided to stand down from the office, following the recent very sad death of her husband, Michael. I am sure that all those associated with the Link, join me in sending Tricia and her family our heartfelt sympathy. Tricia has been the Link's Treasurer since it was founded and has been very involved with and supportive of the Link's works. She has also visited Newton and has a personal knowledge of the people and place. We are very grateful that she feels able to continue as a Trustee.

This year in Newton we have moved on with various projects, despite difficulties in communication and the fact that all the people we rely on in Newton work full time. As stronger schools' links and new community links are forged, I think a mutually beneficial partnership is being established.

We have experienced some issues with work on the **Community Centre** this year. Having been delayed by heavy rains and high winds, the form work and shuttering, for the final pour, was, eventually, completed, in July and the first storey walls finished. A major achievement.

This left the roofing work. Ibrahim Bangura, the Youth Headman, in charge of the site, sent a comprehensive breakdown of costs for materials and hiring the roofing contractor, in late October. In November, funds were sent to purchase the necessary roofing materials and enable work to start. However, the weather intervened and December saw unprecedented storms hit Sierra Leone. As the weather improved, a Contractor was hired to carry out the roofing work, but tragedy struck and he was involved in a serious accident. He was badly injured and taken to Connaught Hospital. Very sadly, he never recovered from his injuries and died there on 25th April. Ibrahim Bangura and Abdul Aaron Kabia are actively seeking a new contractor. The materials are being safely stored.

Ousedale School is linked to **Goshen High School**, and the trustees received an urgent appeal for help, from Abdul Kabia, the Head of Goshen High, in July, to help rebuild the devastated classroom block, which had been severely damaged by gale force winds and heavy rain. Funds raised by Ousedale, plus money from the general fund and donations, were sent to enable the purchase of materials and the hire of labour, and work began. Work was completed and the classrooms reopened. We were asked for further funds to enable desks and chairs to be replaced and basic teaching equipment purchased.

As many of you will recall, **Christ Evangelical School** had to move from its former site and buildings and has been housed in tarpaulin tents and makeshift structures on a new site, which seems to be owned by the Christ Evangelical Mission. This school is linked to the Village Schools Federation, who have been actively involved in fundraising for CE.

A very ambitious new school is planned for the site and VSF are hoping to be able to help with funding the fencing of the perimeter, once details of the extent and cost of materials required are received. The Link is also willing to get involved in raising funds to assist, once we establish the extent of the project and its feasibility.

Janet and Marilyn had a video call with Rev. Sahr Emmanuel Bona, the representative of the Christ Evangelical Mission, when he was in London for medical treatment, to discuss the proposals and establish what was envisaged. It is early days yet, but, hopefully, the build will happen – it will certainly improve life for the students and staff!

A Brighter Future?

The **Newton Photovoltaic** (PV) project is almost complete. A 30 megawatt solar photovoltaic facility, backed by 12 battery storage units, on the same site as a 6MW solar park, will provide power for 16-20,000 homes in the Western region once running. It will also be used as a training centre and model for future plants.

Thank you all for coming this evening. Please continue to support our work.

Anne McCallum (13th May 2026)

News from Newton

The Community Centre

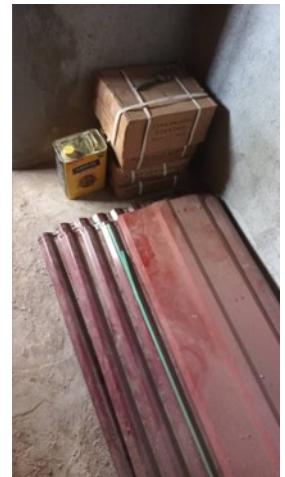
In the last newsletter there were photographs of the materials purchased to build the roof of the community centre. I hoped to have illustrations of the finished product for this newsletter.

Sadly, a crisis intervened. The contractor, Mr Hinger, who was engaged to do the work was involved in a serious road accident and died after spending some weeks in hospital. We sent our sincere condolences to his family.

We enquired of Mr Bangura whether they could engage someone else. The money given to the contractor included materials (which were being stored safely on site) and labour. When someone dies in Sierra Leone it seems there is no obligation to fulfil commitments or repay any money.

Abdul Kabia helped - he set up a meeting between the contractor's family and the community centre's management and I am delighted to report that the family have agreed to give back the cost of the labour, 2 million Leones.

Mr Bangura and Mr Kamala are now searching for a new contractor. The first one they interviewed was too expensive so they are still looking.



Deputy headman, Mr. Kamara

Headman, Mr Emmanuel Conteh

Village P.R.O Mr Cole



Christ Evangelical School

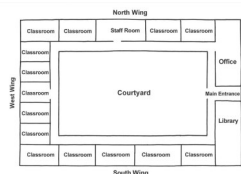
**A meeting with
Rev Sahr Emmanuel Bona
7th April 2026**



Marilyn and Janet spoke to Rev Sahr Emmanuel Bona through a WhatsApp video call. He was visiting London for some tests and treatment and his name was given to us by Komba (former head of Christ Evangelical School) as 'the person who owned the land'.

He was at pains to assure us that the children at the CE school were doing well and had come second in the whole district in recent tests for secondary school entrance. He told us Francis Lavalie was 'the head of the year' locally. There are 300 children in the CE school and more waiting- but there is no space. He told us the land the CE school was on was owned by him and was given to the school 'by the community'. He said the registration of the land had been applied for and the name on the documents was the CE school. The community had bought the land from the church. The land had been measured by a surveyor. This explanation took a long time and was a bit confusing.

They are trying to raise money to build new classrooms and the estimated total cost is 900 million Leones (about £30000) for the two structures - 1st and 2nd floor - but he agreed that they could start by completing the lower floor at less cost.



The CE school had to move from the church building because their rooms were being used for storage of equipment, speakers and the stage and it was not safe for the children. There is no well or toilet block where the school is now. The pump and reinforcement for the well had been financed by the ONL and he said he will investigate when he returns.



We asked about funding the building and what he had done to find funds locally or through other sponsors. He said that although the community had donated the land they could not fund the building. The church doesn't have any money because it is a small local ministry. The church and the government jointly pay teachers' salaries.

We discussed the ONL's limited resources and capacity to raise money and that it would take time. When pressed he agreed that the most urgent thing was to fence in the land to ensure it remained their property. We thought this would be a very good idea as well as keeping the children safe and he promised to get measurements made on his return and send us an estimate for fencing and a gate. This has now arrived and the estimate was £22600 which we are discussing as we feel it's quite a lot for fencing.

Soup Lunch



On Friday March 20th, our annual soup lunch proved to be a great success. The soup was delicious and so were the cakes and biscuits afterwards. Thank you to all who came and helped raise over £400 for the Community Centre.



Some of those who came—and many apologies if I haven't got you in the picture.



Happy 95th Birthday Basil!

We are looking forward to celebrating with you next year too!



Thank you to all those who cooked and helped

Lifepath

We were invited to take part in Lifepath 2026, an event which aims to inform children about the life of John Newton and to reflect on their own lives.

The ONL creates a role play where the children have to imagine that they are in Newton and re-enact the main parts of their day—at home, helping in the house before school, and a school session to learn some Krio. It includes a breakfast of rice water, fetching water from the well, sweeping, doing the washing and cooking.



Thank you to Anne, Marilyn, Rose, Sheila and Janet for being mummies and teachers!



FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2026

Sunday 28th June	Cherry Fair—support our tombola stall. Any donations of unwanted gifts to Anne please, 34 Carey Way by 20th June
Saturday 25th July	Cheese and Wine Evening in the Museum Garden Details to follow

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






A big THANK YOU to all of you who have continued to donate to the ONL through standing orders in these difficult times.

If you'd like to contribute, check our website,
olneynewtonlink.org.uk and select 'help us' from the menu
- or drop an envelope through our treasurer's door -

Marilyn Watkins, 34 Sillswood.

You could also ask us for a collection box in which to put your small change - assuming you're still using real money, that is!

A big thank you to our GOLD sponsors

	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
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Contact Anne or Marilyn for more details of bronze, silver and gold sponsorship