

Updated Notes from Local Interest Group 26th October 2023

Present in Hall: Maureen Lloyd (ML), John Price, Penny Williams, Roy & Avryl Lloyd, Mollie Moore, Dawn Richards, Gina Goodge, Malc Gonella, Cherry Williams, Elsa Harflett, Grace Davies.

On Zoom: Wendy & Dainis Ozols, Jennifer Lewis, Sylvia Illingsworth, Sue Lawler, Diana Lloyd

Apologies: Bronwen Jenkins, Misha Pedersen, Athene English, Joan Lloyd, Evelyn Bally, Helen Barnett, Janet Russell

ML welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the speaker, Penny Williams, who lives at the bottom of Sunnybank in the wonderfully named Waterloo Cottage.

Life and Work in Uganda

Penny started her talk by telling us a little about herself and how she came to be living in Waterloo Cottage. She has known ML since she was young, when she lived in Llanfrynach and ML lived in Pencelli. They used to ride together on the hills above where they lived. She and her husband, Ifor, met when they attended Usk College after they left school. Initially, Ifor had started work in farming, but he then gave this up to become a Baptist Minister. He trained in Cardiff and then got his first appointment in a church in Broad Haven where they lived for 21 years. Some 14 years ago, they moved to Sunnybank and have lived there ever since. They have five children and six grandchildren – not to mention ducks and goats.

One of their daughters, Katie, spent her gap year in Uganda and a few years later Ifor and Penny visited where she had been. Penny showed us where in Africa Uganda is located, being on Lake Victoria with Kenya to the east and the Democratic Republic of Congo to its west. The Equator passes through the southern part of the country.

During her gap year, Katie worked with Pastor John in one of the “suburbs” of Kampala. Pastor John was passionate about education and was determined that all of the local children should be able to go to school. To this end, he built a very “primitive” school where the children were able to learn using the wall as a flat surface on which to write and pebbles on the floor to help them to do sums. When the children went home after lessons, he also encouraged adults to come along to learn the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic so that they would not be cheated at the market. Whilst she was there, Katie and team were given some paints with which to decorate the school and in the photo that Penny showed us it looked extremely colourful. The children had benches to sit on which they could also kneel at to do some writing. Using pictures on the walls, the children helped to teach one another. Other than this, there were few facilities and the school was very basic. Despite this, the children were extremely enthusiastic about going to school to learn as this would help them in their future lives. Penny told us that when Katie arrived at the school they only had three pencils between them and so she and Ifor had taken lots of writing equipment, etc., with them when they went to visit.



However, the landowner had decided to take back the land on which the school was built and so the children no longer had a place to learn. Undeterred, Pastor John was determined to build a new school, but he needed £3000 to buy the land for it. He asked Ifor and Penny if their church could help and the congregation (with substantial help from an extremely generous visiting couple) managed to raise the money required. The new school was built, mostly by the Pastor himself. On the wall is written the school's motto – “Work Hard and Shine”. Katie made another visit to Uganda and once again she decorated the walls. Penny and Ifor went out for a visit. The new school has separate rooms for different age groups. It also has a kitchen with a wood-fired oven. At morning break, the children are given a porridge drink; whilst being rather basic, this is nonetheless better than they might be given at home and so helps with their nutrition. The boys and girls have separate toilets. It was very difficult to build everything on the site because the land is very boggy, but Pastor John has done an amazing job. He has his own office on the wall of which is a list of “rules” telling the staff how to treat the students. Because both parents have to work to earn enough to support their families, it is not uncommon for children to turn up at school with their very young siblings. A well provides water for the children. It is spring fed and the water is collected through pipes in order to keep it clean.

Penny showed us a photo of some green bananas which are used to make the staple food of Uganda, matoke. Children often help with the cooking. The matoke is steamed – it is a little tasteless but fills people up. Another staple is cassava, a starchy root crop that looks a bit like horseradish. Beans and millet are also eaten by most people. One rather unusual food that both Penny and Ifor tried whilst they were in Uganda is crickets. They are bought alive and then cooked before eating. Penny said that they tasted quite nice and were very crunchy. Being on Lake Victoria, there is also access to fish, particularly tilapia. Sugar cane is widely grown and there is always plenty of fruit for sale in the markets, along with butchers' shops. Charcoal is used for cooking. Papyrus is used for making mats; this grows around the shores of Lake Victoria.

Penny said that there is access to electricity for a few hours each day and some shops have refrigerators and so can sell milk. The shops are open all day from dawn until 10pm, because many people have to work long hours and can only go to the shops once their work is done. She showed us a photo of a very basic clinic, but most people would not be able to afford to use its services.

Some parts of Kampala, particularly the modern centre, have properly surfaced roads, but in the poorer areas the roads are mud and become extremely difficult to negotiate when it rains. Women carry loads, often quite large ones too, on their heads. Most things are made by hand, often with amazing skill and extremely basic tools. People are very resourceful and even the rubbish tips are "mined" for any useful "raw material" that can be found.

Penny and Ifor were taken to another school in a different suburb of the city, Banda. This was set up by a friend of John's called Moses. Moses actually has a degree in architecture, but he decided to build a school after he had helped Pastor John with his. This school also has a kitchen where the porridge drink is made to give to the children twice a day. They queue patiently for their drinks – no pushing or shoving involved. They used to be given beans for lunch, but these have become too expensive. As in Pastor John's school, the older children help with the younger ones, often leading the songs and other activities. Because there is a very high mortality rate in Uganda, it is not unusual for grandparents to bring the children and take them to school. Malaria is the main killer, but AIDS is also a problem amongst adults. The infant mortality rate is also very high and because of this parents do not celebrate their children's birthdays until they get to the age of three.



All around Kampala there are hills which have been quarried for stone. Unbelievably, nearly all of the quarrying is done by hand with entire families working to earn a living. The rock is quarried using mattocks and then the stones are broken down into smaller and smaller pieces using hammers. What the people get paid depends on the amount that the lorry drivers who collect the stones are willing to pay. It is Pastor John's aim that even these children working in the quarries should get the opportunity to go to school, but the parents badly need them to help to earn their living. Near to Pastor John's school is a small brick making area. The clay for the bricks is dug up by hand and then moulded into the right shape. They are fired in small kilns.

In order to raise money for their school, the children make beads from thin paper strips cut from old magazines or flyers. They stay behind after school in order to do this. Depending on the flyers, the beads can be a multitude of colours. There are very few government run schools in Uganda and most people have to pay for their children to attend schools run by people like John and Moses. Penny told us that one quarter of the children at the school pay full fees, one quarter pay nothing and about half are subsidised by the sale of the things that the children make from the beads. When Gina asked who provides the school uniforms Penny told us that there is some flexibility as most people would struggle to afford them. When she and Ifor visited, they took a suitcase full of uniform items that they had bought very cheaply in sales in the UK in order to help. The suitcase was then empty for the return trip and so they could fill it with items made by the children to sell here in order to raise money to send back to the schools.

There was another question about phone lines and Penny told us that Uganda has mostly by-passed the provision of landlines and had concentrated on the mobile network, which is actually very good. Phones are cheap and SIM cards free.



Those in the Hall had the opportunity to look at many artefacts that Penny had brought along with her, including things like kapok, papyrus and sugar cane. She had also brought some of the items made from the children's beads; these were for sale to raise money to send back to Uganda.

ML thanked Penny for a most interesting and illuminating talk. It had been wonderful to see the many pictures of the school and Ugandan life in general and these really brought Penny's talk to life, enabling people to get a real feel for the place and the people. Thank you to her for allowing us to include some of her photos in these notes. Penny said that she is more than happy to talk to any local groups and that anyone interested should get in touch with her.

In the Hall, the evening was rounded off as always with refreshments, kindly made by Avryl Lloyd – many thanks to her. Huge thanks as always to John Price for his technical wizardry which enables there to be a wider audience via Zoom. We are all extremely grateful to him.

Next Month's speaker will be Cherry Williams. Her talk will be, "A Lloyd who became an Australian Showman", the story of a relative of hers. Cherry's talks are always brilliantly well researched and extremely interesting, and this should be no exception. There is no meeting in December. If anyone has an ideas for January's meeting, please contact ML.