




LOOKING BACK...

Brian and Norma Herd worked in the Diocese of Karamoja, Uganda, from 1961 to 1977. Here they report on a recent return visit to the region.



 The beggars, cripples and children in the Kampala street were a stark reminder of the poverty and need in Uganda but there were a lot of busy well-dressed people and many small shops and markets were thriving. The number of new expensive cars driven by aid agencies and churches were noticeable.

On Wednesday after extremely heavy rain we flew from Kajansi airfield to Moroto with our daughter, Dr Joy Lawn and her family. We were met by Joseph

Lomongin and David Pedo and welcomed by Deborah (Bishop Peter Lomongin's second daughter). She welcomed us to the community centre, which was a miracle build done in our time when Amin was in power. Deborah had done wonders - beds with mosquito nets, European types toilets with people climbing on the roof to fill the tanks so that they could be flushed, hot water in cans at night and breakfasts.

We had a service in Moroto church. Outside was a large grave for Bishop Peter and we were led out to it to pay reverence. We also visited Anna, Peter's widow. In the evening we had a fellowship in the community centre and staff and other Christians joined us.

On Thursday, we went to Lotome. On the way at Kangole, we met the Archdeacon's wife and were thrilled to find Rufus, one of the first Akarimojong pastors still alive and actually sweeping the church compound. It was a lovely reunion. On our way back we met Zakeri Locheng, the Bible translator and we received a copy of the revised New Testament.

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Rev Richard Ongom and his team in Lotome gave us a great welcome. The church was packed though it was school holiday. As Richard is from Lobwar they had Acholi harps, drums and a good choir. It was a memorable service. All four of the visitors spoke and when the drummers felt moved there was a roll of drums and singing. We had been married in Lotome church 43 years ago. Two of the schoolgirls, Esther and Elizabeth, who had formed a guard of honour, were there - both keen, mature Christians.

SERVICE

After a long service we moved to the Diocesan Training Centre and met Simon Aisu. They provided a meal

and the fellowship was warm especially with a group of singing students. The headmistress of Lotome Girls School, Rebecca Lochero is fairly new there. She is an old girl of the school, converted there as a school-girl. She is really struggling with inadequate buildings and resources.

SURPRISE

On Friday we flew to Kotido which will be the centre of the new North Karamoja diocese. To our surprise MAF landed on an airstrip well outside Kotido (it had moved a few years ago!). We were left beside a large heli-

copter gunship. The bombs and army in numbers were because the Jie warriors had killed 27 soldiers, including an army commander. That was part of the army trying to disarm the Akarimojong. After some time in the sun we joined a soldier under the one thorn tree and sat on boxes of bullets. We wanted to photograph the helicopter gunship but felt it was unwise! After a while we decided to try and walk but we had only gone a short way when a soldier got the officer to come and use his mobile phone and we were collected immediately. It was good we hadn't walked as it was quite a few kilometres and for most of those we passed through lines of Ugandan soldiers and tanks returning from an early morning disarmament exercise.

IN DEPTH

The impressive compound has a clinic (eye treatment, maternity, AIDS etc). Good primary health care to villages is centred on the development office here but is all over Karamoja. We were impressed by the capable witnessing Christians in this kind of work. We stayed in one of the four-ensuite rooms of the new-looking community centre. Each has a verandah with cane furniture and town piped water and solar lighting. The rooms are booked most nights.

Nelson Owilli runs a very impressive Development Office and gave us the 2005 report with a full accounts! There is an empty office ready for the new diocese. The 500-seat church was even more impressive than the photographs we have seen. On Sunday it was the day for the Mothers' Union to take a lively service. One of Joseph Okero's daughters led the singing beautifully - dressed in a

becoming bright outfit and gold backless shoes. They did a long typical drama about a drunken husband who after about six scenes was converted through the MU. The preacher was a lady who had done her master's degree in Dublin. Afterwards we had some food and more coke (we must record our consumption of cokes was extraordinary!).

MINISTER

On Saturday we travelled to Lobwar. Almost all the 15 Lobwar pastors were there to greet us. Lobwar is greener and more fertile. For us it was thrilling to be there and meet so many who knew us before. Rev Florence Omwony had spent a year in Trinity, Bristol and got an MA. On her return to Uganda she married a Lobwar man who is now a minister in President Museveni's government. She works as a volunteer pastor when in Lobwar. The

MU was out in force in matching dresses and full of music and dance.

Karamoja Diocese is to be made into two dioceses this year. We were in Karamoja when the names of the two new bishops were announced - a very poignant moment. They are: Bishop Elect Joseph Abura, Karamoja Diocese 27 May in Moroto and Bishop Elect James Nasak, North Karamoja Diocese 1 July in Kotido.

Looking back on our visit it was limited by being so short. We would have loved to have stayed longer to see more people and places and do more preaching but for us personally it was worthwhile. We continue to pray for Karamoja in this year of change and opportunity and pray too that our visit was an encouragement in the Lord to those we met.

A LASTING INFLUENCE

Peter Steynor reflects on his return visit to Kenya

When I left Kenya in 1979, I little knew that it would be 27 years before I would return. I had spent four years supported by Tear Fund as a Crosslinks associate, building and starting a trade craft polytechnic at the main town of Kapenguria in a district called West Pokot. It is still largely rural and there are few job opportunities outside subsistence farming. The first BCMS missionaries to this area arrived in 1931 and the church had grown slowly since then. So I wondered how different things would be now.

My wife Gill, my son David (13) and I arrived in August 2006 to spend 10 days visiting Kapenguria and other places where small polytechnics had begun. Our reception was overwhelming and African hospitality as so often, generous in the extreme. The population had doubled since 1979, but it was thrilling to see churches that had grown four or five times in size, as well as new churches springing up everywhere.

I had left the polytechnic with a salaried manager, two instructors and 20 students. I now found an unpaid manager, seven instructors and 120 students, most of whom were getting really good results in trade tests and finding subsequent employment. Many were keen Christians with an active witness in the polytechnic. The workshop was well kept and buzzing with activity. Where was the motive in all this, I wondered?

As we travelled around with Shadrack the manager, I realised that I had known him slightly, as a schoolboy. I had spoken at the school Christian Union once or twice. He had also come to some of the Sunday night Bible studies which a few BCMS and other expatriates including his head teacher, had run in their homes. The complete lack of rank or status amongst us as we served one another with food and God's Word had touched him deeply. "Those times taught me how Christians should love one another," he told me.



Peter Steynor worked at a village polytechnic work group scheme in Kapenguria from 1976 to 1979.

The polytechnic is facing many problems such as staff salaries only half paid and three months in arrears, students often struggling to pay any fees at all yet desperate to learn, lack of good dormitory accommodation, cooking premises well below even local hygiene standards, and tools worn out from 25 years' use (I am hoping to find some way to bring help from the UK). But in spite of the challenges, the heart remains to work, learn and serve together. And I have learned an important lesson about what really counted out of my time spent there.

If you would like to pray more about the work of Crosslinks with other Crosslinks supporters then Brian and Norma Herd attend the Weymouth Crosslinks prayer meetings as advertised on the reverse of the magazine. If you would like to start your own prayer group please contact Karen Jefferys on 020 8691 6111.

If you would like to give towards the Karamoja, please mark your gift KAR.

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