

**Report from Mrs Brenda Thornton who was a Trustee and was Secretary of the Trust for many years until she moved out of the Newcastle area.**

In 1991 I was asked by Dr Keith Dick and his wife Dee to be a supporter of a new venture in Kenya near Lake Victoria. This was to build a medical centre at Simbiri (near Lake Victoria) in a rural bush area. A dear friend, Mrs Nan Bell, had been a missionary teacher in Western Kenya for many years. A prayer group (picture right – with Nan Bell in white top) was



formed as Keith & Dee (K & D) went out to Kenya in 1991 to seek the will of God for themselves and their 5 year old daughter, Ruth. During the following months their call was tested and confirmed and plans made. This was an amazing time as funds were raised and K & D prepared for this change in their lives. A Land Rover was purchased and adapted in UK to be shipped to Kenya later. Plans were drawn up to build a medical centre in three stages. Land had been donated freely by local



people who were very happy to have the promise of medical attention within walking distance. It was a shock to discover local people were using unsafe river water for drinking (as well as washing etc – see picture left). As a result, typhoid fever was common (more so malaria) and was a huge cause of premature death, especially in children. One priority was to build a home for Keith, Dee and Ruth.

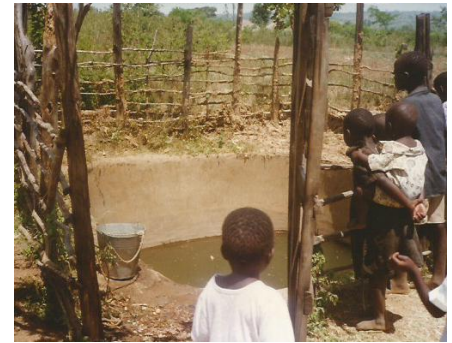
There were so many huge problems to overcome e.g. planning permission, building, employment and legal work. It was determined not to give in to the common bribery and corruption as this was a Christian based project, and there was much prayer for all major decisions.

Keith & Ruth had to overcome much sickness (malaria and amoebic dysentery) and they lived with very spartan facilities. Ruth amazed everybody learning the local language fluently by going to the local primary school (picture right) and playing with local children. Eventually, she was sent to St. Andrew's Christian boarding school in Turi, 200 miles away, which was heart-breaking every time good-byes were said. Hard to imagine that back in the 1990's there was only postal communication unless they drove 50 miles on mostly dirt roads (see pictures below) to Kisumu which could take two hours where there was a telephone and electricity. Today, still no electricity is on the Project site but mobile phones in recent years have proved extremely valuable.

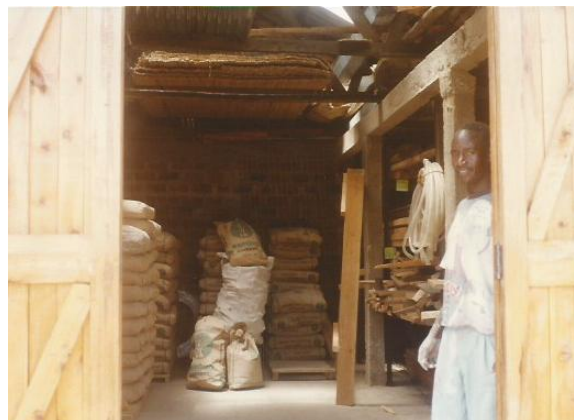




A roadway was cleared through the bush land necessitating constructing a concrete bridge over a seasonal river. A concrete lined water hole was constructed on site (picture right) to collect water from a nearby road used in the building work. Men were employed to make bricks and K & D's house was the first building, then a secure large store-house for all building materials. A carpenter/store man was employed also 2 night watch men's huts were erected. 3,200 eucalyptus and cypress trees were planted to form a fence around the large project land.



The pictures below show some of the building work in progress.



The 1<sup>st</sup> phase (3 rooms) of the Health Centre (HC) was constructed by 1995. Stages 2 & 3 (picture below) were built by 1997 giving 11 rooms which included two wards, as finance enabled.



A 77,000 ltr stone water tank was built (picture right) drawing water from the corrugated iron roof of the health centre.

Some lady employees opened a “hotel” on site – a bamboo covered frugal kitchen enabling food, mostly chapattis, to sell to building workers (about 30 local men), patients and staff. See pictures below.



Then the exciting time of having furniture made and unpacking equipment donated from UK (picture below). Phase 1 opened even as phase 2 continued to be built. There were always patients waiting to be treated (picture below).

The third picture below is of local people showing their appreciation for the Project.



I visited twice, firstly as K & D's house had just been completed and plans were progressing, and secondly after the HC phase 1 had just been opened. It was wonderful to see progress; patients waiting to be seen by a clinical officer/nurse or Dr Keith. Very ill patients were often brought in by wheelbarrow or bicycle. I was amazed and impressed to see the compassion and care that K & D showed to everyone who knocked on the door of their house (Maranatha) to explain their needs (medical emergencies, accidents or frequent financial requests). Dee was such an organiser, fair but firm, with compassion, a quality I really admired. Keith was meticulous in all areas of building e.g. making toilet areas free of mosquitos with a vent pipe and netting. I know he was frustrated sometimes because of tasks not being carried out per instructions resulting in breakages or waste of time-his patience.

I enjoyed visiting the local church and loved the worship and hospitality of the local people who were so generous in giving from the little they had.

I used to send out newsletters printed on Gestetner stencils with drawings of stick people as illustrations (how things have progressed!). In my Tea Shop, "The Dove" in Newcastle, the

customers were generous in giving to the Project and interested in its progress. Many fund-raising events were held.

It has been wonderful to see the progress over the years into phases 2 & 3, and then in 2011/12 building a children's ward. A very significant addition was the building of a large refrigerated mortuary run off a 65kw diesel generator in 2005. This has proved very helpful for people of the area and financially helpful to the Project.

The employment of (now 49) mainly local staff and ancillary workers has lifted many families out of extreme poverty, saved lives through the medical attention and safe drinking water. Also the provision of mosquito nets locally, laboratory facilities and lately preventive clinics has vastly improved the quality of life and life expectancy of the people in the area.

I know how thrilled Nan Bell (who died in 2001), who was the original sponsor, and also the people of Simbiri who have not survived would be to see their children having a better quality of life through their vision, prayers and work.

Written March 2014