

# Don McMath Foundation

## Newsletter

[www.donmcmath.org](http://www.donmcmath.org)

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The Don McMath Foundation Newsletter – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004

Hello All

### Well we have started building at last!

We finally received the necessary documentation from the Gambian authorities on 20<sup>th</sup> March and started work on the wall the next day. Once the work was started it progressed really quickly and the wall was finished by 14<sup>th</sup> April.

There were up to 40 laborers & bricklayers working on the project. Nearly all of them were parents of children at the school and locals who want to see the new school built as soon as possible.

First they dug out trenches about a meter deep, which was hard work in the sun and on very hard ground. The ground is clay and one time they found a collection of frogs buried about 18 inches down, so Anne insisted that they very carefully removed them to another place, to give them a chance of survival. Anne thinks that the builders think she is quite mad to want to save them, and it is probably why, when they found a poisonous snake in the trench one morning, that they stoned it to death before telling her, in case she wanted to save the snake as well.



The next job was to mix up red stone, cement and sand to make concrete, which is done by hand. This is then wheelbarrowed to the trench and poured in. At the same time a metal pillar is embedded at each corner of the walls and where the gates are to go. These are then bent round nails sticking out of a log to get the correct shape before binding them together. (No popping down to B & Q here).

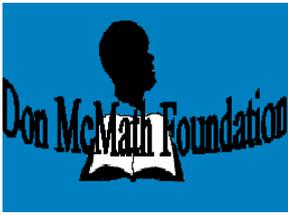


The bricklayers then got to work. But they only lay blocks, so you have to make sure that the laborers keep them supplied with cement, blocks and water. If any of these things are not adjacent to where they are working, they stop and wait until they are.

The carpenter then made boxes around the rods, and these were filled with concrete, so you end up with concrete pillars. They

had made about 13,000 blocks before we started, but had to make more so there was another gang working on that. We think they probably made about 18,000 blocks altogether.

All of this was going on at the same time so there were about 5-6 gangs of workman most of them worked very hard, but they seemed to be unable to forward think. e.g. they only made cement when the first lot had been completely used. As we only had one foreman, (Barro) he could not be in all places at the same time, so Anne ended up



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supervising all the different sections. Unfortunately, though she protected most of her body from the sun, she forgot her hands and ended up on the first day with them badly burnt, so much so they have not healed completely yet.



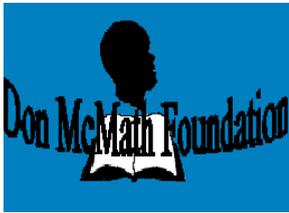
Though there were a lot of workers, the wage bill was quite low. The rate for the laborers was about £1 per day and the bricklayers £2 per day. Ousman (who lives opposite Anne) took a register each day and Anne paid them once a week when they would queue up to collect their pay.

We also had big entrance gates and a smaller service gate made by the welder. This took longer than expected because the electricity supply was appalling, it was only on about 4 hours a day on average. Someone saw him at 3.00 o'clock in the morning one day making the gates because the electricity had come back on.

The next task is to build the Nursery School. We think in some ways this will be easier because everyone will be in the same place and not scattered all over the field. We have had the plans drawn up and hope to start making the bricks late in May when Anne goes out again for two weeks.



Everything is going well at the school. Malin is back from maternity leave, which we are very pleased about, as she is a very capable senior teacher, and is determined to keep high educational standards in the school. Anne got the visa application forms for Malin's visit to England later in the year. The British High Commission requires a lot of



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information from the foundation, which we are in the process of collecting. Also Malin has to apply for a Gambian passport and the Gambians interview every applicant!!! Can you just imagine if that happened in Britain? When Anne goes back in May they will take the visa application to the High Commission and then Malin will have an interview, and they will decide if she can have a visa to come to Britain.

Talking of the High Commission Anne had drinks at the Commissioners residence. It was very pleasant, as it overlooks the sea and they were served drinks on the lawn. The upshot of this was that the High Commissioner's wife visited the school, and the children sang for her.

We have also had visits from the local councilor for Kotu and the Alkali (headman). So we are getting known. There is also a chance that when we have built the Nursery the Vice-President of Gambia will come and open it officially.

In the past we have recommended Lavender Lodge as a place to stay in The Gambia, but sadly Amanda & Lamin are selling it. Amanda is expecting a baby, so they have decided to return to England. Anne will really miss them both, as they have become good friends, and in times of stress she could escape to their swimming pool.

We would like to thank all of you for your continued support, without you none of this would be happening, we would like to specifically thank everyone who came up with goods from our "shopping list" in the last newsletter, we now have a computer, scanner, printer, 2 treadle sewing machines, lots of school books, lots of musical instruments, a globe, the promise of at least one full teams football kit and 2 ex royal mail bicycles for



the use of the school staff. We also have two contacts who will help us crate the goods and ship them out to The Gambia later in the year at a very large discount. Thanks specially to Debbie Palmer, Peter Woods (who will have a classroom named after his sister, Biddie), Samina Ahmed, Carol Cooper, Graham Cook, Audrey Sewell, Mike and Angela Daymond, Shirley Collier, Roger and Debbie Coggan, John and Linda Kitchen, Tony and Michelle Philogene, Hilary Hodgson, Di Pomeroy, Pauline Ash and the Rotary clubs of Erith, Verwood, Battle and Bexhill.

Our next shopping list will consist of all the electrical and plumbing supplies we will need for the first school building. We hope to have this list ready when Anne returns from The Gambia in June.

As the summer approaches we are all starting to think up more fund raising ideas. There will be garden parties in both Bexhill and Verwood in June/July to which you will all receive invitations. We will have a stall again in the Verwood Rustic fair and in the Hastings festival and hope to participate in various car boot sales.

Anne, Mick and Judy McMath

May 2004