

## The Container is at its last resting place!

December 15 & 16 2009

It is always wise to have someone local with you when you try to find a bus at a Ugandan bus park.

You may find the name you are looking for on a bus or a minibus, but that doesn't guarantee that it will be going within the next hour and a half if it isn't full.

This morning I left Gulu for Kitgum which is in a remote part of the country, near Sudan. My visit is in part to see for myself the 40foot container which had left Nailsea school months before, crammed with furniture, computers, books, footballs etc. on a long journey by sea and land to a needy part of a link diocese.

Its journey has become a prolonged saga. Tomorrow I hope to see that it has arrived safely.

A seat in the front of the bus; 'for the Mzungu' can be a doubtful privilege. Space is tight, the gear box gets hot, and as ever you are surrounded by piles of luggage. An added extra on this journey was the text message I received just as the bus was leaving to inform me that British Airways staff had voted to strike over Christmas. So here I was travelling to the farthest point of my trip and unable to get back to Entebbe in time to get a plane before the strike. The thought of Christmas by myself in Kampala was not an enticing proposition! There was little I could do except savour the journey. I noticed how much change had come to this part of Uganda since the LRA had finally ceased harassing the population with abductions and ambush. The countryside showed signs of cultivation for the first time in 20 years and villages were being rebuilt.

The journey was uneventful; a few stops for roadside sellers to surround the bus. You can have anything at this time of year as long as it is mangoes; a 'comfort stop' (in the bushes); and my first sight of a monitor lizard ambling slowly across the dusty road.

We arrived more or less on time. I looked around for my host but he had been delayed. I have learnt that something unexpected will usually happen to resolve the situation. This time I was taken by a stranger to the 'shop that sells everything'; a small store by the bus park owned by Lampton a key lay member of the local church. I spent an enjoyable half hour, refreshed by a Coke and talking to the customers. My lift arrived I was deposited in a modest hotel which had the advantage of being in by the market place, so sitting on the verandah was never without interest. In the evening I was joined by diocesan staff for a tasty goat currie

The next day was container viewing day. It had been packed with such a wealth of school equipment that opening it up had been like discovering an Alladin's cave. Most of the equipment was to be used by *The Rev Jabuloni Issoke Memorial College*. This is run by the Diocese of Kitgum to provide secondary education for those who would not otherwise be able to afford it; many are orphans or in child headed families, the result of year's of conflict. I spent an rewarding time with representatives of the school who had interrupted their Christmas holiday; students, teachers, ancillary staff, and governors. Most of the furniture had been unpacked and some was being used at the time of my visit by members of a day workshop. The books were being sorted to be used appropriately. Everything had survived the epic journey. After a tour of the school we reached the container which fitted in remarkably comfortably in its surroundings near the Cathedral and next to the Counselling Centre built with funds from Bristol. Photographs were taken and we were joined by Salome and the Child Care staff in the Counselling Centre before eating together.

It was agreed that this is probably now one of the best equipped schools in the North of Uganda. and there is immense gratitude for all we have been able to do through this imaginative project.

Stuart Taylor



## **December 20th Consecration Day of a new bishop of Northern Uganda**

St Philip's Cathedral Gulu was abuzz with preparations for many days before the big event. An outdoor podium was reconstructed; the Cathedral roof was painted; the surrounding houses were spruced up and a lot of garden tidying took place so that all would match the splendour of the occasion.

As I sat by the Cathedral one day in the evening sun I listened to the choirs rehearsing local songs in distinctive African harmony. The Halleluiah Chorus reminded me of the visit to Fort Portal earlier in the year

The day before the big event there was a rehearsal of Bishops so I saw some old friends of the Bristol Diocese. Last minute preparations were very much in evidence. A platform was still being constructed with concrete. One of the best sights of that day was the tired builder who relaxed into the wheelbarrow to have a nap between loads of concrete mixing. Awnings were constructed. Lorry loads of singing parishioners arrived from distant parts. The new Bishop's house and compound filled up with excited friends from his parish of Bugalobi in Kampala. I came across a bus load who needed directions and was greeted with whoops of gratitude when I told them I would be their guide

At night security forces made preparations for the attendance of the President.

In the evening I became the Bishop's chaplain's chaplain accompanying Willy Akena to see that all was well. We found some visitors with no place to stay so we took them on a very

bumpy road to the University retreat house where we also met Johnson Gakumba the new Bishop.

On our return we negotiated security checks to visit the Bishop's compound to see that all was well. Groups of women were preparing chickens for cooking by large wood fires behind the house. Many thousand were expected so catering was a big undertaking.

Finally we got to bed about midnight, listening to the singing of the visitors in the distance at Gulu High School, their hostel for the night.

Next morning was an early start. The first call was to pick up the Bishop's suit which he had left behind. His house was bustling with people preparing for the great event. A memorable sight of the morning was the Bishop's 6 year old daughter dancing around on the verandah in her new pink and purple satin dress. The suit was found and delivered. On the way I found myself walking past two newly slaughtered goats and a pile of chicken's insides. No anonymous supermarket meat here!

As promised we picked up the Bishop and his wife Christine an hour later, but because of security we could not easily get to the Cathedral, despite insisting that we had the main person of the day with us. I was given the Bishop's two sets of robes to carry. The tricky bit came when we went through the security scanner, and I had no hands free to take the money out of my pocket. The scanner alarm went off, I was barred from going further but with great difficulty I persuaded them that I was not a threat to the President.

At last we delivered the Bishop Elect to the Archbishop, and I was relieved of any more responsibility.

A grand procession of Bishops started the service as we sang 'O Worship the King.' At one stage the fire brigade arrived to dampen down the ground where the President would walk. The new Bishop changed robes twice, The outgoing Bishop, Nelson gave an excellent resume of what he hoped he had achieved, There were many greetings, and stunning dancing of the traditional Royal Welcome by young people from Pader. The new Bishop gave his Charge, M.P's and local leaders spoke. The congregation received Communion. The President arrived to make his own speech.

Five and a half hours after the service began the New Bishop gave the blessing and it was time for food. A nice biblical number (about 5,000) were more than adequately fed. Crates of 'soda' were drunk. Many danced. The young people in traditional dress gave us more demonstrations of their talent. All agreed it had been a great day.

Late in the evening as I shared a family supper with Willy (the Bishop's Chaplain) we could hear the women's groups entertaining the new Bishop and his wife. Prayers are greatly needed for them both as they set about the task of guiding a diocese through the difficult stages of peace after two decades of rebel fighting when 1.8 million were displaced and 24,000 young people were abducted. It has already been discovered that the problems of a new peace can be as complicated as an old war.

Please support them with your prayers.

Stuart Taylor



New arrivals at consecration from distant parish  
(No photographs were allowed at the service because of the visit of the President)