



Promoting friendship & understanding
through financial support for Nigerian education

The Britain-Nigeria Educational Trust

Patron : Sir Mervyn Brown, KCMG, OBE

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Dear Member,

NEWSLETTER

Last year the Nigeria High Commissioner's reception on Tuesday 17th November marked the end of our operational year and the second anniversary of The Britain-Nigeria Educational Trust since becoming a membership charity. It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening and our grateful thanks go to His Excellency Dr. Dalhatu Sarki Tafida, OFR for once again generously hosting this event which is regarded by most members as the highlight in our event's calendar. In his address our Chairman, Derek Reeves, MBE spoke about the progress that had been made not only through our continuing commitment to the support of education in Nigeria but also in raising awareness of the Trust. He spoke too of the recent changes to the Board of Trustees: -

Professor Graham Furniss, appointed last September, is Pro-Director for Research and Enterprise at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His research has been focused on popular culture and oral and written literature in Hausa, a major lingua franca of West Africa. He has worked at, and with colleagues from, a number of Nigerian universities. He chairs the British Academy Africa Panel, is a former President of the African Studies Association of the UK (ASAUK), the founding President of the International Society for Oral Literature in Africa (ISOLA), and founding editor of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. His publications include *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture in Hausa* (EUP), *Orality: the Power of the Spoken Word* (Palgrave Macmillan) and, with Richard Fardon (co-ed.), *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition* (James Currey) and *African Languages, Development and the State* (Routledge). Graham is a Fellow of the British Academy and chaired the steering committee that produced *The Nairobi Report* (British Academy/Association of Commonwealth Universities).

Mr Tim Cooke was appointed to the Board in November 2009. Son of the late Nigel Cooke, who was Senior Resident for Kano Province until 1962, his grandparents too had lived in Jos for over 50 years and his passion for Nigeria stems from those deep-rooted family connections. Tim returned to Nigeria in 1982-84, working in Iluke Government Secondary School in the former Kwara State under the auspices of VSO. He then developed a career in market research for businesses, co-founding two publishing companies providing news, data and reports for leading corporations, governments and universities. Tim now devotes his time to advancing education in developing countries, including the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and supporting young entrepreneurs.

Until now one of our weaknesses has been the lack of any formal representation in Nigeria. In a move to correct this Engineer Greg Ojeh has been appointed our Resident Representative, Nigeria. Based in Lagos his role is to monitor the effective use of disbursements, support major projects and to identify and evaluate deserving opportunities. In time we hope he will be able to develop a Nigeria based membership bringing the benefit of a Naira income. Greg, who spent 25 years with Nigerian Breweries plc before his retirement, is well known to us as he has been overseeing the project in Umutu to construct a girls' secondary school.

MEMBERSHIP

❑ Subscription Reminder

All subscriptions became due on 1st January 2010 and the Membership Secretary has sent out reminders to all those still owing. We are grateful to the many that have already paid, especially those who have done so using standing orders, and also to those who have enhanced their subscriptions by Gift Aid.

If you have not yet paid (and according to our records 58 members are outstanding), and wish to remain members, it is important payment is received before 30 June 2010. Those in arrears after that date will no longer be able to take part in the affairs of the Trust. Subscription rates are just £20 for Individuals or £30 for Couples and to put that into perspective each single subscription is sufficient for the Trust to provide textbooks for one class of children at an Elementary school. The combined subscriptions from twenty-five members, or a

donation of £500, cover the fees and cost of an undergraduate student for one year at a university in Nigeria. We do make your subscriptions count and we do value your support, which is so important to our work.

□ **News about Members**

Since our last Newsletter we are pleased to welcome the following as joining members:

[Dr Ashiru Abiola](#) from London
[Mrs Nguba Agolia-Aspinall](#) from London
[Elizabeth Dudley](#) from London
[Oladeinde Falase](#) from Leeds
[Dr John Kirkland](#) from London
[Victor Nnadozie](#) from London
[Rita & Steven Odumosu](#) from Hertfordshire

□ **In Memoriam**

◆ **Joan Sheffield, MBE** who died last December 2009.

We extend our sympathy and condolences to her family and friends.

EVENTS & FUNCTIONS

➤ **Sussex Regional Meetings**

The Sussex Branch of BNET met on [Saturday 27th June 2009](#) in the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex where 18 members and friends attended the meeting. The speaker was Robin Story who spoke on "Glimpses of Pre-Colonial West Africa". His talk was illustrated with readings from a wide range of writers, spanning many centuries, starting with Herodotus on Hanno's Voyage from the 5th century BC to Margery Perham's account of the Battle of Sokoto from *Lugard* written in 1960. The talk was well received and was followed by a lively question and answer session.

After the talk members enjoyed drinks and an excellent curry lunch.

Mr Garba Zakari of the Nigerian High Commission represented the High Commissioner and extended his greetings to the Britain-Nigeria Educational Trust. He asked that members give their thoughts to two important upcoming anniversaries; the 50th Anniversary of Nigeria's Independence in 2010 and the centenary of the formation of the state of Nigeria in 2014. Suggestions as to how to celebrate these events will be welcomed, as the Trust is liaising with the Nigeria High Commission over its planned programmes.

A second meeting of the Sussex Branch was held in the same venue on [Saturday 24th October](#) when 28 members and their guests gathered to hear Ruth Holmes talk about her experiences in Northern Nigeria in the decade 1953-1963. Ruth worked as a teacher, taking a particular interest in art and introducing it as an extra-curricular subject in a number of schools. Her husband, Michael Holmes, worked as a doctor in Nigeria. A number of members present had known, or worked with, Ruth and Michael during their years in Nigeria. Her talk stimulated a lively series of reminiscences from amongst those present. As is customary the talk was again followed by the usual curry lunch.

➤ **Visit to the British Museum**

Some years ago the Sussex Branch was given a talk on the Benin bronzes. It emerged that there were several hundred bronzes in store in the British Museum and the public rarely saw these. Robin Story considered this to be a great pity and he contacted the Museum to find out whether the bronzes could be privately viewed. He received an enthusiastic response.

So on [Thursday 17th September 2009](#) 10 members of the Trust met at the North Entrance of the Museum.

Soon they were sitting at a table on which 15 pieces were displayed, a thrilling experience. Curators, Jim Hamill and David Noden, were there to describe how the Benin material had been acquired by the Museum following the punitive raid by the British forces on Benin City in 1897. They answered all the questions. "Did Nigeria want these treasures returned?", "What were these various items used for?" and inevitably "How much are they worth?". It was discovered that the Museum has strong connections in Nigeria with institutions such as Lagos University and the museum in Benin City, where it trains some of their staff.

It was not surprising that BNET members oversubscribed places for this visit and a second took place on [Thursday 19th November 2009](#). Further details of all the Benin bronzes may be found on the Museum's website at www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk. Click on the "Research" and "Search the collection database" links: enter "Benin" in your search.

Our thanks go to Robin Story for initiating these visits and for this report and to Alastair Burt who undertook all the administration of them.

➤ **Scottish Regional Meeting**

The annual meeting of the Scottish Branch was held as usual at the Royal Overseas League Club, Edinburgh on Saturday 17th October 2009. The guest speaker was our own member, Sheila Everard, who gave an interesting and stimulating talk about Owerri in the aftermath of the Civil War. This was followed by a lively question and answer session and the traditional lunch.

We are very grateful to Sheila for giving this year's talk and to Ros and Ian Kerry for organising the meeting.

➤ **2010 Programme**

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|---------------------|---|---|
| Saturday 15 May | - | Sussex Regional Meeting, University of Sussex. |
| Thursday 15 July | - | Annual General Meeting, Royal Over-Seas League, London. |
| Saturday 2 October | - | Sussex Regional Meeting (provisional). |
| Saturday 16 October | - | Scottish Regional Meeting, Royal Over-Seas League, Edinburgh. |

Full details about each of the above events and application forms will be circulated in good time.

EDUCATIONAL UPDATES

Despite the economic downturn, which has severely reduced the income derived through bank interest and dividends, your Trustees have ensured our commitment to on-going projects has not wavered. A summary of the Trust's continuing support for Nigerian education last year is as follows:

❖ **University of Benin**

Phase I of the university's E-Learning Centre has been fully operational since the end of 2008 and the Trust's only contribution made in 2009 was £6,809 to fund the broadband rental fee. The funding of Phase II for a further 50 computers is constantly under review and a decision will be taken once the Trustees are confident all the administrative controls and support services are running smoothly.

❖ **Tafawa Balewa Teacher Award Scheme**

Following the success of its introduction in 2008 (90% graduation) a second award has been given to another thirty-seven teachers (one from each State as before) who are upgrading their teaching skills through the Nigeria Certificate of Education programme run by the National Teachers' Institute, Kaduna. Under the Tafawa Balewa Teacher Award Scheme, N47,500 has been given to each teacher to cover their course fees for 2009 and, subject to them maintaining a satisfactory performance, it will be repeated in 2010 and 2011. This is a commitment of over £7,000 for each of the three years.

❖ **Small Grants**

Small Grants is the category that describes our support for applications that have no on-going commitment or administrative requirement and are limited to a maximum award of £5,000. The Resident Representative regularly monitors all small grant awards. Last year £1,000 was allocated to the Gethsemane Rehabilitation Centre, Jos which provides support and education to orphaned children and the charity Hope for the African Village Child received £1,500 for learning books and other educational materials. As part of our continuing support to raise the awareness of Nigeria's culture and history a grant of £1,500 was given to African Legacy towards the restoration of a museum at the *Akodi Afrika* cultural centre. We also maintained our sponsorship of a VSO volunteer (£2,000) for a two-year placement of a Teacher Trainer to the College of Education, Akwanga.

❖ **Umutu Girls' Boarding School**

Progress with the building of a girls' secondary school at Umutu has been disappointingly slow and no further funds were released during the year. However, the school has managed to open, but on a limited scale, admitting its first intake of students on September 14, 2009. The Catholic Diocese of Warri has undertaken to fund the completion of the present infrastructure, as was the Trust's original agreement with them, and this will be sufficient for the school to handle student intake for two years. The Trustees will continue to monitor the school's progress and will consider further requests for financial support as the school's capabilities expand.

❖ **Students**

Student Kachi Ozumba was awarded a second grant of £1,500 to complete the final year of his studies at Newcastle University for a PhD in Literature/Creative Writing. He gained his degree with distinction and the Trustees were delighted to note his story *The One-Armed Thief* was selected winner from over 5,000 entries for the African region in the 2009 Commonwealth Short Story competition. His first novel *The Shadow of a Smile*

was published by Alma Books in October 2009. Continuing grants totalling £815 were awarded to three Nigerian students for their fees at Delta State University (2) and Anambra State University (1).

❖ Commonwealth Scholarship & Fellowship Plan

In support of the newly established Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) the Trust has agreed to contribute £10,000 per annum over the next five years towards the establishment of a visiting fellowship at the University of Ibadan. The purpose of the Fellowship, which will be known as The Britain-Nigeria Educational Trust Commonwealth Fellowship, is to assist in the University's planned programme of development as an international centre for postgraduate training and research. The Fellowship will fund the appointment, annually, of a senior visiting academic to work with university colleagues for a period of up to three months in all aspects of teaching, supervision, mentoring and joint research. This Fellowship is part of the Trust's strategy to make a permanent and noticeable impact on education in Nigeria.

NOTICEBOARD

❑ The Cloths of Heaven by Sue Eckstein

Published by MYRIAD EDITIONS 2009 and obtainable from all good bookshops and online book suppliers.

Sue Eckstein will be known to many BNET members as the wife of Alastair Burt, Sussex regional organiser, and as the writer of several excellent radio plays, including 'Kaffir Lilies', set in northern Nigeria, whose story recurs as one of the background themes in this book. Liz Moloney has kindly written the following review:

Sue Eckstein's novel, whose title is inspired by Yeats's poem 'He wishes for the cloths of Heaven', is a marvellous tale on several levels and requires no background in West Africa on the part of the reader to cast its spell. There's no doubt, though, that people who have lived there will derive an extra pleasure from it. 'Bakinabe, West Africa, 1989' is fictional, of course, but Sue Eckstein is clearly drawing on her years as VSO director in The Gambia for her vivid sense of place and also, at least in part, for her motley collection of characters.

Daniel, the sensitive young man recently arrived in the British High Commission, enjoys 'driving down palm-fringed dirt roads, with the sea shimmering behind the dunes, past wizened old men sitting on wooden benches in doorways watching the world go by and groups of women carrying water pots on their heads, their hips swaying in ways which made it difficult for him to swallow' while children shout 'Toubab! Toubab!' He soon enters much more deeply into the world of disparate expatriates marooned in this picturesque corner of West Africa. They include the 'resident iconoclast', Patrick Redmond, and his patient, observant wife Isabel, and Alec, the dim High Commissioner and his wife, Fenella, both having affairs, both mocked by Patrick as the sort of people who 'start to decompose if they ever leave the compound or spend more than five minutes in the company of anyone not originating from the Home Counties'. Beyond the city in a mission compound in the bush, Father Seamus and Sister Mary Philomena with their fridge full of beer and their therapeutic card games absorb the despairs and assist in the struggles of volunteers and other expatriates alike.

Increasingly, Daniel is obsessed by the mysterious young Englishwoman in the Lebanese cloth merchants' shop and finds himself on a quest for the truth about her that involves the others in his odd new life in Bakinabe. The inescapability of the past and the longing for love are constantly interwoven into these people's stories, as are the gaudy cloths sold by the enigmatic Englishwoman.

It would be wrong to disclose the details of the plot, for this is a book with a real plot with twists and turns and a surprise ending. 'The Cloths of Heaven' is as good a page-turner as a thriller, with the lingering and satisfying afterglow of the best literary novels. When you've bought one copy and read it, you will probably find yourself buying more as gifts for friends – and not just those who have lived in West Africa.

The Cloths of Heaven will be the Woman's Hour Drama 15th to 19th March 2010 every day at 10.45am and again at 7.45pm on Radio 4. You can listen again on www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer

❑ Carvid Books

One of our members, David Kelly, runs Carvid Books, which deals mostly in secondhand and out-of-print books and which has Africa as one of their speciality subjects. Their latest catalogue of books on Africa has over 400 items for sale, including some very collectable books. There is much material on Nigeria as well as West Africa. The catalogue may be obtained by calling David on 01580 712968 or by emailing carvidbooks@yahoo.com

□ **The Nigerian Field Society**

The dates for the meetings scheduled in 2010 by the UK branch of the Nigerian Field Society (NFS) are: -

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|----------------------|--|
| 24/25 April 2010 | AGM and Spring Gathering at Hatfield, Hertfordshire. |
| 19/20 June 2010 | Summer Gathering at Alnwick, Northumberland. |
| 11/12 September 2010 | Autumn Meeting in Devon. |

BNET members are very welcome to any or all of these events and should contact the NFS Secretary, Sheila Everard for further information if you wish to attend. Contact details are by telephone on 0191 384 8546 or by email sheilaeverard@shincliffe68.freemove.co.uk or write to 18 Hill Meadows, High Shincliffe, Durham DH1 2PE.

□ **Ah! This Nigeria!!**

After just six month's availability the first print run of this book sold out and, as a result of its popularity, a reprint is currently in progress. All proceeds from its sales have benefited the Ishahayi Beach School Foundation.

With such positive reaction, and offers of new material so widespread, a follow-up volume is planned for autumn 2010 and this time it is intended to cover the whole of West Africa. Anyone wishing to contribute with an experience of their own that may be of interest then please get in touch with Alec Travers: -

White Rose Cottage, Conghurst Lane, Four Throws, Hawkhurst, Cranbrook, Kent, TN18 5DZ.
Tel. No. 01580 753347, or email at alectravers40@hotmail.com.

There is no restriction to length or brevity but the story must be true!

I cannot close this newsletter without mentioning the 50th Anniversary of Nigeria's Independence; we are consulting with the Nigeria High Commission over their planned programme of celebrations and as soon as we have agreed our involvement a notice will be circulated to every member. In another exciting move we are endeavouring to facilitate the twinning of Ormer House Preparatory School in Alderney, for which our member Hilary Bentley is a trustee, with Aleka Academy in Ankpa the school founded by Chief Emma Williams, MBE and supported by the Trust. Once the internet link has been established, which will provide the children of both schools the chance to interact and learn about each other's school and domestic way of life, we believe it will be the first time a Nigerian and an English school have bonded in such a way.

With every good wish,



Secretary