

27 July – Save The Date

Ashanti Development took its present form of a charity combined with a limited company about ten years ago, so we're turning our summer party into a tenth anniversary party, and hope you'll join us.



Over the years, we've spent most of the money you've given us providing isolated rural villages with clean water and latrines and teaching them about health and hygiene. This leads to a huge boost to their general health and energy. We've done this now for 25,000 people in nearly sixty villages.

We've also built:

- five kindergartens and a primary school
- school latrines
- five computer centres and a library
- a dress-making college
- four clinics – one dedicated to eye health. There's a sixth on the way
- a museum of local history
- an office for the disabled
- five food processing centres

We've distributed thousands of secondhand prescription spectacles and arranged for over 1,000 cataract operations to be carried out by Ghanaian surgeons. We're currently renovating and re-equipping the local maternity hospital.

Some volunteers run their own projects under our umbrella. We're particularly proud of the teacher-training project, run by volunteer Dave Banks. It aims to give responsibility for better teaching to the teachers themselves, and Dave helped them set up a process to achieve this. Marker exam results in our area rose year on year from average 32 per cent when he started to a high point of 89 per cent a couple of years ago. Thousands of children have benefited.

Another big success is the microcredit scheme, managed by volunteer Ishy MacKinnon. It teaches women numeracy and business skills, and then provides them with three consecutive loans for trading and farming. There's a similar system for

farmers, which teaches them modern agricultural methods and provides loans for good seeds, tubers and agricultural equipment. The schemes have led to big increases in family income and are very popular.

Other volunteer projects include training local people to keep bees, described elsewhere in this newsletter. There's also a tree planting project, inaugurated by our staff in Ashanti, acting in the capacity of volunteers; a project to eliminate worms in young children; to collect money for infant food supplements and free school meals; to twin Ghanaian and European primary schools; and to support hardship cases across the villages.

Projects are carried out by our staff in Ghana, mostly local people, led by Nicholas Aboagye. They are outstanding in their honesty and commitment, probably all the more so because in the UK we are a 100 per cent volunteers' charity, and pay no wages or salaries to anyone.

Ashanti Development's summer party will be held on Saturday July 27 at 4.30 pm at The Tenants' Hall, Underneath Tresham, Lambs Conduit Passage, London WC1R 4RE. Tickets cost £16 and can be bought at the door or via Eventbrite at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/a-taste-of-ghana-tickets-64167157696>.

We'd love to see you there.

Ashanti Honey – Terrific on Porridge

By Dawn Williamson and Paul Bloch. Dawn Williamson is a Director of Ashanti Development.

During a visit to Gyetiase in 2014, we went for a walk to the 'Holy Mountain,' a well-known place of pilgrimage. We found honey for sale at the side of the path. The honey was reasonably clean and packaged in a plastic water bottle. The price was high. Clearly this was a luxury item.

The following market day we went to Mampong to see if there was honey for sale in the market. There was. Once again it was high priced, reasonably clean and sold in plastic water bottles.

We began to ask questions about beekeeping as we visited various Ashanti Development projects. Were there any beekeepers in the village? Were there any honey hunters in the village? Did anyone know of any wild bee colonies?

We found just one honey hunter, an immigrant from the north. There were no beekeepers and no beekeeping tradition according to the elders. We found just two wild bee colonies, one close to Tadiesa and one close to Dadiase.

As we chatted with the elders they told us that they greatly value honey.

We'd been told several times that we would find something worthwhile to do in Ghana and we wondered if beekeeping was that thing.



Agado helping Elen at Patasi after a fire

It is not easy to develop a beekeeping project.

- Not everyone takes to beekeeping
- Upfront investment in beehives and safety clothing is needed, with no guarantee of return on this investment
- Skills and confidence take many years to develop
- There are many risks to bee colonies including fire, drought, suspicious locals, insecticides and lack of habitat as well as poor beekeepers themselves

- We were not certain that there were enough bees in the area to get us started

The benefits of a good beekeeping project are well documented and include improved plant pollination rates, improved local skills and income to beekeepers.

We decided to try.

We recognised this would be a long haul and that if it was to be successful we would need to commit to at least five years of financial and training involvement.

Now, five years later, we can tell you that this has certainly been a long haul and if our measures of success are sustainability and a profitable project then we are finally just about there. This most recent harvest season (there is a large and a small harvest each year and the most recent was the large harvest) produced at least 356 litres of honey. We say 'at least' because some beekeepers harvested earlier and some later and we are not sure that every litre was recorded.

At Ghc.30 (£4.40) a litre, either sold in the market, sold locally or sold to a Kumasi wholesaler, the value of that honey is around Ghc.10,680 (£1,500).

There are about 130 hives deployed around the various Ashanti Development villages. A hive costs around Ghc.72 (£11) to build. Include training and

management costs, cost of tools, local transport costs etc etc and this project will take another couple of harvests to be in overall profit. That is not though how we measure success or profit.

Success is sustainability.



Samuel at Gyetiase

If villagers are making money from beekeeping, then they will invest in more hives at their apiaries and will replace hives or protective clothing as it wears out or becomes damaged. They will pass their skills to the next generation and a tradition of beekeeping will develop.

As we said at the start, with any beekeeping

project there will be individuals who take to it and those who do not. Our ambition was to have perhaps half of those trained continuing to keep bees, some selling a little honey and enjoying honey at home. Perhaps 10 per cent to 15 per cent of those trained would make a business of beekeeping. That is roughly how things have progressed.

Our input is now almost complete in Gyetiase, but there are other opportunities for Ashanti Development beekeepers through our links with Bees Abroad, a UK based beekeeping charity. Because the Ashanti Development beekeeping project is well established, Bees Abroad are planning to make use of some of the teams' skills in Ghana. They have asked us at what price we would be able to build and supply hives to Bees Abroad projects and are interested in sourcing beekeeper training for various of the Bees Abroad projects. We have yet to offer protective clothing supplies, but we can do that also. It will be good to help Bees Abroad, having sourced training support from them in the early years of this project. These additional income opportunities will also be welcome for Ashanti Development and its beekeeping team.

Of the local beekeepers, one family has managed to build up to at least thirteen hives. They are now successful and skilled beekeepers with a profitable honey business. There are several

other slightly less ambitious beekeepers able to supplement their farming income with honey sales, and then there are a number of hobby beekeepers harvesting a little honey for sale and some for consumption at home. There are two competent local trainers and a team of people able to build hives and make protective clothing.



Ashanti Development honey

Looking at where we are now, we are pleased to say that this project has been a success.

We encourage you to buy Ashanti Development honey if you visit Gyetiase. It's good on toast as everyone knows and terrific on porridge.

Children, discipline, and rote learning

by Mark Ryan

Mark's been to Ghana several times, and the following is an extract from a newsletter he wrote for his friends.

One of the things I like most in Ghana is the combination of optimism, enthusiasm and stoicism, which is especially noticeable in children. Children in Gyetiase want to spend time with me, and although they are aware of how incredibly privileged I and other volunteers are, they don't seem to resent it. No child will let me carry my own bag. I was curious to know why they are so polite and unself-consciously devoted to helping me, and I had a little insight when Acheampong showed me his Religious and moral education school notebook.

The book is full of instructions and explanations about their importance. Among the reasons to be obedient to our parents are:

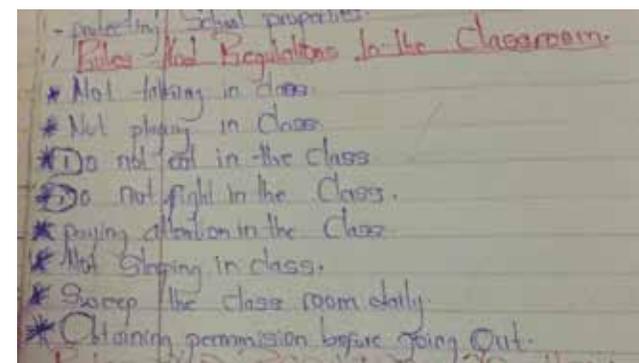
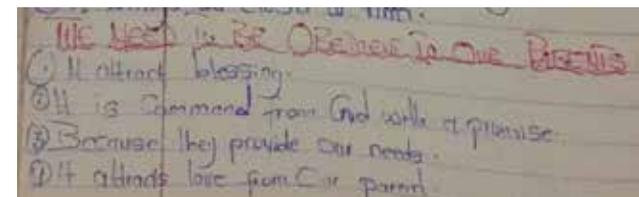
- it attracts blessing;
- it is a command from God with a promise;
- because our parents provide for our needs; and
- it attracts love from our parents.

Rules and regulations in the classroom include sweeping the classroom daily, as well as the more expected stipulations of not talking, playing or fighting.

There are tens of pages of these instructions. Religion is treated very seriously in this community, and God is constantly invoked, either as a way of thanking you ("May God bless you and your family") or as a way of motivating a good deed or good behaviour.

While it is clear that children understand the gist of the rules in the notebook, I have the feeling that it is somewhat based on formulaic and rote learning. In one section, there was a list of 'advantages of chastity,' which included honouring our parents and avoiding unwanted pregnancy.

What is chastity, I asked Acheampong, but he was stumped. Asked about others of the rules, he was happy to read them out perfectly, but not very able to explain them. But he is only fourteen :-)



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News in Brief

Ashanti Development volunteers were invited to hear our Principal Patron, Keir Starmer MP, choosing the music he'd like to take with him to a desert island. The photo shows Keir being interviewed by comedienne Ayesha Hazerika.



We've been visited by the agricultural extension officer to check on reported infestations of army worm. Army worms - see photo - turn into moths, and can destroy whole harvests in no time at all.

According to Wikipedia, "the larvae often exhibit marching behaviour when travelling to feeding sites, leading to the common name 'armyworm.'

Luckily, we have quite a big farm support programme underway, as a result of which the farmers spotted the army worms early on, and knew where to turn for help.

That aside, the yam and maize crops in particular are said to be looking very good this year, so not much hunger in the villages.



After nearly ten years of trying, our eye clinic at Gyetiase has finally gained government registration. This means we'll be able to claim back all treatment costs, including staff salaries, from the government. Another cause for celebration.