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**Diary Dates:**

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May 24 – evening concert

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July 23 – A Taste of Ghana  
summer party

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Sep 10 – sponsored walk

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All the above in  
central London

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See website for details

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**To be confirmed:**

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May 21 – Gospel choir  
concert

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Early June – Swimathon

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### April 2016

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## Miracle at Bimma

**Ten years ago, Bimma village in the Ashanti Region of Ghana consisted of 2,500 subsistence farmers who scratched a living by inappropriate farming methods in an area hit by climate change. Children suffered most. Polluted water and lack of sanitation meant three in ten babies died aged under two years, while the youngest family members always had the least to eat.**

**Today, Bimma is one of the most sought-after places to live in the Ashanti Region. Ashanti Development spent two days last July assessing the changes.**

Bimma's fortunes changed in 2008 when Barrie Coates, from the Rotary Club of Leigh, visited the area with his wife Joan and decided to try to turn it round. "Our aim was to make everyone's life tolerable, if possible even comfortable" explains Barrie. "We wanted to put them in a position where they could work themselves out of poverty," he says.

Ashanti Development found that the changes wrought by the Rotary Club's generosity succeeded beyond their wildest expectations. Bimma now has clean water to drink and every household has its own household latrine and some rudimentary understanding of germs. Diarrhoea, which people previously regarded as a way of life, has all but disappeared, leading to much better health and energy levels. There are fewer mosquitoes, and they do little damage because the Rotary has distributed mosquito nets to every family, and trained people on how to use them.

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*Right*

Refurbished borehole

Nowadays, there is no hunger in the village and every child goes to school. There are small shops everywhere and plenty of building work is underway. People have more spare time and keep the village cleaner than before - rubbish tips are tidier and footpaths are cleared.

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In recent years the population has doubled, as people from less fortunate areas ask permission to move in. The Chief of Bimma is a good manager and has organised the flood of immigrants well, so old and new communities live peacefully with each other. He stipulates that newcomers must learn health and hygiene and must construct their own latrines. “We understand now that latrines keep us healthy,” he says. “We don’t want newcomers to lower our standards.”

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### **Farming**

One of the people who has benefited most is a young farmer called Kwabena Asiamah. Kwabena explained that before Rotary initiated a farm support scheme, he made no profit from his farm. On the contrary, he was barely able to feed his small family.

*Right*

Kwabena Asiaman with his household latrine

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Then Rotary initiated their Farm Support Scheme.

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“The scheme changed my ideas right round,” he says. “It showed me that I should think of farming like a business – like banking or trading – and that I should therefore work at it with my whole strength.”



Before the scheme, Kwabena believed that the more seedlings he planted in any one hole, the larger the yield. He was amazed to learn that he would do much better by just planting one. After one year of training, his farm yielded a harvest at least three times as great as the

previous year. He has now been on the scheme for four years, and cannot tell how many times greater his harvests are today. "Many many times," is his closest estimate

Kwabena's family used to live in one small room in a family compound, with a shared kitchen and no latrine. He is now building a seven-roomed house for himself. He has a new car. He is hugely enthusiastic about life, and works very hard. The difference is that whereas before his hard work had little effect, now it makes a huge difference to his family's income.

### More Changes

The Rotary Club made many other improvements, including building a food processing centre to mill corn and process cassava - which has a short shelf-life - into its long-life form. People come from surrounding villages to use these machines and the centre is typically in constant use all day.

#### Right

Kindergarten extension



In Africa, when food is short the smallest children are the first to feel hunger, so the Rotary introduced free school meals. They have also built a kindergarten and an

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extension to the village's primary school – both necessary because of the large number of incomers to the village.

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### Microcredit

Thanks to the Rotary, the village has a flourishing microcredit scheme, providing business training and small loans for women. The women form groups to guarantee each other's loans and support and advise each other, and are given three sequential loans of £40, £60 and £100 on presentation of a satisfactory business plan.

Repayments are made at a rate and level the women themselves decide. Some repay late, but so far not one woman has failed to repay her loan plus interest eventually.

Akosua Serwoaa was born in Northern Ghana and never learned to read or write, though she can count. She married young and had six children. She said that before microcredit, her life was very difficult. Farming only just enabled her to feed her children, but many families in Bimma were much worse off than she was, she said.

She used to work on the farm at least eight hours a day, and one year she planted ground nuts and lost the whole crop when the rains didn't come. After that, the family struggled for years to get back on course.

Akosua believes that the business training she was given made all the difference and enabled her to draw up a good business plan and manage her loan really well. She still makes business plans from time to time. She spent her first loan on trading in smoked fish, and managed to repay it and earn a second loan very quickly.

At that point, the Rotary Club agreed exceptionally to buy her a fridge on microcredit terms, and her business took off. Several times the electricity failed and all the fish went bad, she said, but despite the problems, the business thrived.

Nowadays, Akosua's life is much easier. Now she can buy everything she needs and pay the children's school fees.

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Three of her children are now at secondary school and she is planning to build a new house. Better still, she says, now she's even got savings for back-up.

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**Thanks from the Village**

Babies rarely die in Bimma nowadays. There have been no infant deaths since 2011 – a key indicator of the health of the community.

**Right**

A plaque, erected by the village in gratitude to Leigh Rotary Club



All in all, the Rotary Club spent about £80,000 and earned the undying gratitude of the village. In a collective letter of thanks, the Chief, Elders, Assemblyman and citizens wrote to express their profound appreciation of the numerous ways in which Rotary had improved their lives. They asked the Rotary to continue working in the area, since surrounding villages still suffer hardship, and they sent their blessings for all the Rotary's undertakings.

“We cannot find words to thank you adequately. We thank you for ever for adopting Bimma as your second home,” they said.

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## Making Globalisation Work

**Sean Williams describes how he came to set up a website to sell Ashanti clothes direct to consumers all over the world. Visit [www.ashantibespoke.com](http://www.ashantibespoke.com) to see what's on offer.**

I recently visited a rural village called Gyetiase in the Ashanti region of Ghana with a fantastic volunteers' charity, Ashanti Development. One of the projects I saw there was a dressmaking school for young single mothers. These young women pay a few pennies a term and are taught to be seamstresses. This is a trade that will earn them a decent living. The women make wonderful hand-made garments to sell at the market in the neighbouring town of Mampong. They also make all the school uniforms for local schools.

While there is a relatively sizable local market for the hand-made garments there is a much, much bigger global market for hand-made clothes.

If you want a hand-made shirt or dress or blouse you can buy one direct from the seamstresses in Gyetiase. You, as a consumer, get a great hand-made garment. The seamstresses, as the producers, get a good wage and meaningful training. Any surplus goes to Ashanti Development to make more of these projects.

Why pay an intermediary when there is no added value? Direct trade and the technology that facilitates it will be the next big disruptive force.

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## Exam results

A few years ago, Dave Banks, a retired teacher, volunteered for Ashanti Development as a semi-permanent teacher trainer.

We asked Dave to find a way to upgrade school performance across a wide area, perhaps a whole District or more, which could be implemented easily and economically. After a period of observation and discussion, Dave did just that. He documented his work, and started looking for a publisher, but was afraid Ghanaian teachers might perceive it as something devised by ‘foreigners’ which ‘foreigners’ were seeking to impose.

So he came up with a better idea. In order to ensure ownership of the programme by local staff, he and the District’s two lead supervisors reviewed and re-wrote the work. The supervisors then trained seven circuit supervisors to cascade the programme to teachers throughout the District.

Last year’s exam results for the District are now out and the headline figures are amazing.

JHS3 (West African Leavers Exam)	%
2011	32
2012	45
2013	54
2014	69
2015	81

Dave is won’t take all the credit for this dramatic improvement, but likes to think he had some small part in it. He is also quick to point out that the figures mask serious issues, such as how the pass mark is calculated and the actual level achieved.

Despite this, he is now under serious pressure from neighbouring Districts and elsewhere in Ghana to come and work with them.

**Chris and Helen Hartley-Sharpe are joint heads of Ashanti Development's medical work in Ghana. They didn't visit Ashanti in 2014 because of the risk of ebola but were pleased to find, during their 2015 visit, that all the health initiatives they had previously set up were working well. Below is a report of their visit.**



Mosquito nets

Mosquito nets, which were almost non-existent when we first came out in 2009, are being released to all households in the region thanks to a Rotary initiative coupled with a new government program. Whilst we are still providing nets for some pregnant women and children, the need has become very much the exception rather than the norm. Understanding of how nets help to avoid malaria has also become widespread.

The provision of a nutrition supplement for undernourished children, Weanimix, appears to have been so successful that overall numbers of undernourished children have reduced. Along with the fact that the volunteer Community Based Agents (CBAs), or village healthworkers, are now involved in identifying these children, this means that we may be able to scale down this programme over the coming year. So whilst the scheme will continue and the area covered may expand, the overall cost per child may well reduce.

Volunteer CBAs have continued to provide malaria treatment, which still remains the greatest cause of death in Ghana, for children under five years old. Supplying drugs for doing so is now the responsibility of the district health authority, and is fairly reliable, with up to ten children treated per village per month. The digital thermometers that we had provided for accurate temperature taking to aid diagnosis had almost all failed since they were issued in 2012, and we replaced them with a cheaper and much more robust model with a three-year battery life. We note that this type is now widely used in health facilities in Ghana.



A CBA weighing a baby

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Unfortunately government funding for healthcare has reduced, with a significant impact on people with both chronic and acute health issues. Even people who have paid for subscription-based National Health Insurance are finding that this does not cover their treatment requirements, and many people without incomes are still failing to access healthcare. Two examples that we came across were:

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- Kwame, a 15 year old school boy, who came to see us with a most horrifically infected thumb, which had remained untreated for three weeks. We know his family quite well, and they did not have enough money to take him to hospital. We feared that amputation might be the only way to save his hand, but after 48 hours of antiseptic dressings, antibiotics and pain relief, it started to improve. We concentrated on maximising the future functionality of his hand, and trained one of our healthcare assistants to change the dressings after we left.
- Unfortunately Joseph, the diabetic patient we diagnosed in 2010, who had been doing so well, has deteriorated badly. We paid for him to attend an outpatient appointment at his regular hospital, where they offered to admit him to stabilise his sugar levels. We declined when we discovered that the hospital did not have the insulin that he required for the management of his diabetes! Instead we taught him to use our blood sugar testing equipment so that he could measure his sugar levels, and visited him at home twice a day to help him manage his existing medication.

In order to help tackle similar issues in the immediate future we are arranging some residual health funding that can be made available on request by Ashanti personnel via the 'WhatsApp' instant messaging smartphone application. Hopefully this will enable people to receive treatment that they couldn't otherwise afford before their condition gets out of control.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors for this trip, we had enough surplus money available to pay for latrines for a small village (called JY – pronounced 'jay why') under the

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A home in JY Village

Ashanti Development develop-a-village program. We are doing this in collaboration with another volunteer who has raised funds for the latrines in a larger adjoining village (Dangati). These will be the first of the 'settler' villages to be developed by Ashanti Development and are inhabited by settlers who came down from the north about 25 years ago. JY is named after the first settler at this site, John Y Mensah (nobody can remember what the Y stood for!) The village is well run with a strong community ethos and the people we met were very nice. As is common in this part of Ghana there are no toilet facilities of any type, which results in a perpetual health risk for all inhabitants. The installation of latrines is always the first step for any villages that Ashanti Development works with, closely followed by a reliable supply of safe water. The village is already included in the baby-weighing program, so we will be looking to establish a CBA in order to facilitate nutrition supplements and malaria treatment for children.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and extend to you the thanks that we receive from the people whose lives are improved by the work that you fund. This is probably exemplified by the mother who literally knelt at our feet to express her gratitude for treating her son.

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## The Golden Stool

Ashanti Development runs a twinning programme for schools in Ashanti and their counterparts in the UK. Many schools put a lot of effort into nurturing this partnership, and Goldington Green Academy in Bedford spent five weeks working with professionals to put on a play in December about the Ashanti's 'Golden Stool.'

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“The event was brilliant and over 230 people attended,” said equality and diversity manager Tracy Wilson. “The atmosphere was electric and the children did a brilliant job re-enacting the story of The Golden Stool.”

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According to legend, high priest Okomfo Anokye caused the Golden Stool to descend from heaven and land in the lap of the first Ashanti king, Osei Tutu. Since then, many wars have been fought about its ownership, including the War of the Golden Stool which resulted in the annexation of Ashanti to the British Empire.

**Right**

Children performing at  
Goldington Green Academy



The play was specially written by Martin Hanson and Emmanuel Abakah and the children performed traditional Ghanaian dance routines during the production.