

Visit from our Link Parish, Taung, in South Africa 1st-11th July 2011

This visit was an inspiration! Seven visitors from St Chad's, Taung (our Link Parish in the Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman in South Africa) came to visit us: to stay in our homes, to eat our food, to see our sights and to share in the life of our four churches. They smiled, laughed, danced and sang (though I am sure they must have had times of homesickness) and they offered us very warm friendship, and a glimpse of their uninhibited faith in and love for God. Another marvellous aspect of this visit, was the way our four churches all joined in. It was wonderful to be working, laughing and praying together in our various churches: sharing the experience.



Here are all seven of them (left-right): Mabel Serebolo, Marcia Tshirang, Mary Jane Malebo, Tumelo Smous, Tsholofelo Maputle, Kgomotso Gabonnwe and Peter Applegreen just after their arrival from the airport on Friday 1st July.

And here they all are with the welcoming party assembled at St. Michael's to greet them.



The time was packed with visits, tours, meals and services. On the first evening the seven guests were invited to an informal supper at St. Peter's. There were 46 of us in all, including Jean Fooks, currently Sheriff of Oxford, and the best thing about the whole evening was when our visitors joined together to sing to us in their joyful, uninhibited and absolutely INFECTIOUS style. We did learn, however, that they are NOT keen on salad - "What is this - GRASS?!" Here are one or two pictures from the occasion.



Tony Lemon writes:

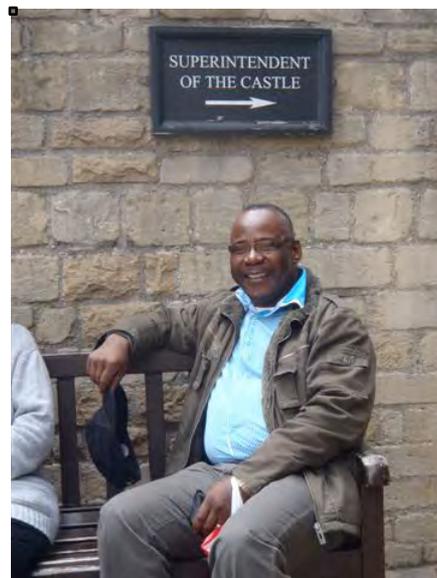


"On the first Sunday, all the visitors, plus Marion Boulton and Jo Willoughby, travelled to Woodstock, where the sun shone for lunch in my garden. On the way to Blenheim Park, Jo obligingly demonstrated the use of the stocks,

but no rotten tomatoes were at hand." We walked up to the Victory Column, celebrating victory over the French and the Bavarians of John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough at the battle of Blenheim. We then walked down to the lake, with the odd helping hand over the stiles, with good views of the Grand Bridge and Blenheim Palace, Sir John Vanbrugh's Baroque masterpiece, before returning to my home for a welcome cup of tea."



Another day they visited Windsor Castle, and Sue Smith has sent a couple of pictures which tell their own story: is Peter looking for a new role???



One of the engagements listed for the visitors was 'Cream Tea at the Vicarage' and Margaret Williams gives an amusing insight into the visitors' expectations beforehand.

Margaret writes:

"... Mary Jane and Tsholofelo came for a pre-concert supper. Lovely ladies, a pleasure to entertain – such a shame they could not have stayed the whole evening. Over the meal, Mary Jane asked me "What is a cream tea?" Apparently, they had had coffee with cream on top at the airport and not liked it much, and the idea of tea with cream

really put them off. When I explained that the cream would be on the scones rather than in the tea, they were very relieved. "We won't tell the others – that's our secret" and they had a little giggle!"

One great highlight for us 'locals' was the Musical Evening, when it was intended that we



should each share some of our own music. If it had been a competition, which it was NOT, Taung would have won by



miles ... Poor Robin Lipsey had the unenviable task of trying to lead us, but we found ourselves so very uptight and inhibited, that it was difficult for us to share our music. The Taung visitors suffered from no such problem, and the church RANG with their joyous harmonies and improvisations as they danced and sang. We warmed up gradually, and I believe it is right to say that in the end we all thoroughly enjoyed the evening and will treasure

the memory for a long time. (We probably won't forget in a hurry Mark's hilarious demonstration of the actions for 'Swing low Sweet Chariot' either!). **(The solo singer in the picture above is Kgomotso.)**

There were LOTS of events on the programme, some involving all the visitors - for instance the supper at the Baptist Church (much enjoyed by everyone) which was on the second Saturday - and some where they were entertained in smaller groups or separately. Mary Jane, who is Headteacher at the school in Taung, was invited to Wolvercote School (since, as well as the Church Partnership being linked to the Parish of Taung, the two schools are also linked) and we understand



from the staff at Wolvercote School that Mary Jane's visit has really 'brought the link alive' for the children.

You can see the two headteachers (Mary Jane and Anna Balance) here together.





This picture shows **Tsholo, Tumelo, Kgomotso and Mary Jane looking at the URC Bible Triptych** (which was on loan to St. Peter's for Petertide).

At the end of the week we all got together for a Review of the Link with St Chad's. The Review went well, but it became clear that there are effectively *two* links (one between our Church Partnership and St. Chad's, and one between the two dioceses) – and it is the K & K Diocese which manages the Learning Centre in

Taung (which was to have been used for AIDS education, and is now intended for more general use). It was evident that the visitors from Taung feel that they have no control over progress, or lack of it, at the Centre, and are concerned that we may hold them responsible for what does or does not happen there. It was made clear at the Review meeting that this difficult situation IS understood. The Review was followed by a service and supper for everyone at St. Michael's, and on the final day there was lunch, again for everyone, at the URC – another occasion for singing and dancing!



The end of the visit was marked by a small irony: the African visitors had defied our nervous expectations about poor time-keeping, and had arrived everywhere as planned, but the

minibus which we had arranged to transport them back to Heathrow was half an hour late! I should say that some 'wriggle room' had been built in and they arrived in plenty of time for their plane. Indeed the whole visit had been immaculately planned by our wonderful team: Margaret Broadbent, Gill Harper, Beryl Knotts, Lorna Logan, Anne Shaw, Sue Smith and Rosemary Williams.

Thinking about the visit as a whole, I think that Beryl Knotts, who is one of those who has visited Taung, has provided some very useful insights. **She writes:**

"Towards the end our friends were confident enough in their relationship with us to start talking about the apartheid years. One friend, particularly, told me how they remember as a small child being herded onto a truck with their family and all their belongings, and driven out and dumped in the countryside where there was nothing! ... If nothing else, if they gained confidence in living closely with us in our homes, and

vice versa, that is a big step forward for humankind! I do believe close relationships were fostered which I trust will stand the test of time."

Beryl also writes:

"Their perceptions of us here were fascinating to hear (ie. they will eat differently when they go home - less fried food; they will ride bicycles; they will plant flowers and vegetables; why do we have people buried round the churches with gravestones and not in cemeteries further away? Considering how apprehensive they were about each staying with a white person, it was clear that they appreciated the experience as, as one said, they would never have such an opportunity in Taung."



To finish, here is a picture of Mary Jane, Marcia, Kgomotso, Tscholo, Peter, Mabel and Tumelo (with hosts Rosemary Williams, Margaret Broadbent and Lorna Logan) standing in front of the statue of Nelson Mandela in Parliament Square in London. We understand that visiting this statue was probably, for them, the **highlight** of their ten-day visit.

Caroline Harding