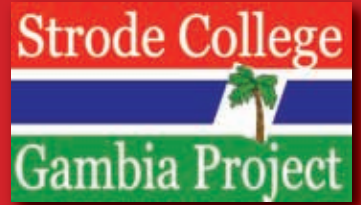


**Gambia special** as building nears completion!



# STRODE NEWS



## Stop press...

Strode gets excellent results in Oxbridge applications (see back page for further info)

# The Gambia Project

The students at Strode College have been fundraising and helping to organise the Gambia Project for the past two years as part of their enrichment studies.

The project aims to build and equip a youth centre in the Gambian village of Tujering. It will have a computer room with internet access, a small kitchen with a café area. Outside a hard court which can be used for basketball, volleyball and badminton is already completed.

Tujering is a poor village where there would be little or no chance of being able to afford a project of this kind. It's quite an undertaking and every year Strode students visit to help with the project and distribute the aid they have collected; for example clothes, books and toys for the local schools.

On their visits to the Gambia, Strode students get to spend a day with a Gambian family; sort through the donated items on the containers; help with the young children in the nursery; play team games, offer English-language speaking classes and make music with local people. This year, together with local young people they also worked out how to manage the youth centre and internet café so that the project would be self-financing.

## How the project started

The driving force behind the project is Lorraine Smart, Head of Student Support, who has been involved in the Gambia since she first went in January 1976. She taught office skills and was the high school bursar. Lorraine has kept in touch with her early pupils, some of whom now hold important positions in the Gambian economy. For example, Hannah Forster is now Executive Director of the African Centre for Human Rights.



Lorraine with pupils in 1976

In 2005, Lorraine asked young people from the village of Tujering in the Gambia what they wanted by way of facilities. They asked for a youth centre. A quotation from a local builder put the cost of construction at £15,000. So on her return to the UK, Lorraine started fundraising and offered a group of interested students the opportunity to visit the Gambia. Thus the project was born.



## Student fundraising

The whole College gets involved in the fundraising. Students got in a lather washing cars to raise over £50. The second year Travel and Tourism students organised a very successful charity fashion show which raised over £280. Student Saffron Rarity, organised a concert in Street Parish Church; an evening that raised £600. A sponsored bike ride took place raising well over £500. An auction was held which raised £1,608. This was enough to put the roof on the building and pay for posts and nets for the hard court.



# What students learn by working for the Gambian Project



- Africa is demystified – not everyone is pot bellied and starving;
- That it is easier to be poor in a hot country than a cold country;
- The benefits of the extended family support system;
- That a single person can make a difference to someone's life without donating money;
- How well dressed poor people can be;
- The competence of young people in another culture (for example seeing a Gambian 16 year old cook a meal for 20 people);
- To compare tourist and village life and how visitors are treated;
- The potentially negative aspects of tourism tempered by the positive impact on the economy;
- Respect for elders;
- How beautiful a poor environment can be;
- Learn about each other as well;
- How a group of students can work co-operatively and handle responsibility.



## Pupils, teachers, bosses & office workers are getting the Gambia bug

Cosyfeet shoe boss David Price has got involved. He said: The people are always very friendly and welcoming. I enjoy the huge contrasts; with subsistence agriculture side by side with advanced technology. You can't get a good mobile phone signal in Ashcott but you can across the Gambia. On the other hand I spent a long time talking to the cow man; I doubt his job has changed in 500 years."

St. Dunstan's School teacher and Connexions advisor Jackie Hopkins, together with her pupils are enthusiastic about taking part. They have been fundraising and sending books and equipment for Gambian secondary schools. She says that staff at Connexions are now keen to help. "It's infectious". Even some of the construction team are talking about going out there to do some work.

## Gambia Trip 2008

### Diary

Visiting the sacred crocodile pool, walking to Bakau to the market and exploring the Abuko Nature Reserve were just some of the highlights of our first week. We stayed in a collection of small mud huts with thatched roofs in Tunbung Art Village, owned and managed by a very well-known Gambian artist, Baboucarr (Etu) Ndow.

We were invited to watch the Secondary School Sports Day and enter the relay races. We had the enthusiasm but were outpaced fairly early on in the race and never really had a chance to catch up. We put it down to the hot weather!

The Mayor was very impressed with the court and the building of the Youth Centre. And we were delighted that there was always a group of young people playing on it. The group were invited to take part in an 'inaugural' volleyball match. Three students joined in and were happy to be on the winning side! While we were there we purchased and donated volleyball, basketball and badminton equipment.

One task was to arrange the distribution of all the goods donated. Sorting hundreds of pairs of shoes donated by Clarks was something of a challenge, especially with the local children all trying to lend a hand!

We had a meeting with our counterparts, the Youth Leaders of the village, in order to discuss the ongoing project. Now back home, Lorraine is planning the official opening ceremony of the Youth Centre in February 2009 and raising the last £7000 needed to finish the project.



Above and right: shoe chaos and after the sorting!



# A life-changing experience

Going to the Gambia has turned around the lives of not just the Gambian students but the Strode ones also. As a result of the first visit to the Gambia, two participants changed their university degrees to Peace Studies and International Studies and a third has attended a Mondo Challenge (a volunteer overseas project).

Alice Essam was one student who changed her degree choice after going. "I had such an amazing time in The Gambia in February 2007, I am still in touch with the girl I spent the day with. I have changed my degree course from French and Spanish at Durham to Chinese and International Development at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) – and taken a gap year to travel and experience different cultures."

The last word should go to James Davies-Hale who said of the project "It's a life changing experience and reality check. It's a chance to experience a unique culture (and get a tan!)"

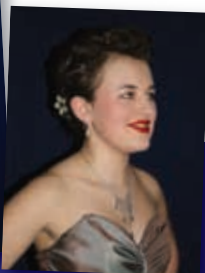
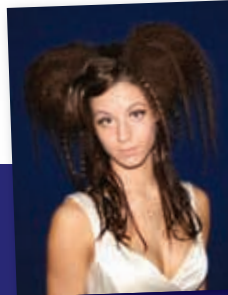
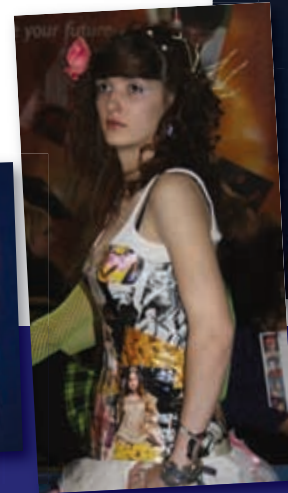


# Hairdressing Competition

sponsored by international and local businesses, the largest college hair show of its kind in Somerset took place in April. The Strode College 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Hairdressing Competition attracted competitors from all over the county.

There were some fabulous prizes on offer: such as professional styling equipment from Wella, Toni & Guy, Hokkaido scissors and Aston and Fincher. Competitors could also win training days with some of the county's top salons.

They worked simply at ordinary tables and chairs with just the kit they brought with them. Scissors flashed and brushes pulled hair high above heads. And the results were simply stunning as can be seen from the photos here.



# Oxbridge dreams come true

Strode College has had outstanding success in the Oxbridge applications process this year. Out of 18 Oxbridge applicants who were interviewed, nine have received offers: five from Cambridge and four from Oxford.

Tom Coysh (formerly of St Dunstan's School) will be studying Medicine; Oliver Hart (Ansford) Engineering; Lauren Deacon (Crispin) Engineering; Rory Cheyne (St Dunstan's) History; and David Moody (St Dunstan's) Physics at Cambridge.

Lauren Cowley (Crispin) will be studying Experimental Psychology; David Brock (Ansford) Engineering; Carys Roberts (Wells Blue) Philosophy, Politics and Economics; and Rachel Edmunds (Crispin) Law at Oxford.

Richard Frapwell, Head of Careers and Higher Education Guidance at the College said, "The fact that we have achieved the highest number of offers ever, is no doubt, thanks to our new 'Gifted and Talented' programme which aims to encourage the highest aspirations amongst our students."

The students spoke highly of the Gifted and Talented programme. Lauren Deacon said: "Having practice interviews meant we knew what to expect and it built up our confidence." Rory Cheyne said: "It was good to be with other people going through the same process and the open day visits were really helpful."

Pictured: Tom Coysh, Rory Cheyne, Lauren Deacon, David Brock & Oliver Hart.

