

Visit from Friern Barnet to Mozambique, 2005

The parish St James and St John, Friern Barnet, is linked under ALMA with the church of St George in Beira. There have been visits both ways in the past: Fr Isaiah Andrice, the parish priest of St George's, has visited Friern Barnet, and Elizabeth Tucker visited Mozambique in 1998. Sadly, she never reached Beira itself because of a road accident while she was travelling there with Bishop Dinis, an accident in which the bishop's wife Berthe was killed and Elizabeth herself seriously injured. Since then Elizabeth has worked tirelessly in maintaining the link and keeping alive the awareness of it in our parish. In July/August 2005, David and Frances Philpott and David's brother, John, renewed the personal contact with a journey in the



Father Isaiah and family

course of which we visited a number of the scattered rural churches in Father Isaiah's care, as well as St George's itself.

There is now a direct flight from Johannesburg to Beira airport, where we were met by Father Isaiah and Chris Hemborough. Chris (with his Landrover) was to make our subsequent journey with Father Isaiah possible. He and his wife Comica run "Project Mozambique", supported by their church in Somerset, providing educational material (printed, on audio tape and film) in Mozambican languages to churches and schools. They live in and work from a flat in a building owned by the Anglican Church – a former Mission to Seamen building, the ground floor being used

for church purposes, such as a nursery school. Fr Isaiah and Cremilda and their family live next door in the same compound.

We arrived on Sunday too late for the



St. George's Beira

service at St George's, but were invited to a non-denominational service that evening for English speaking people working in or passing through Beira. It was surprising how many such people there were, from various countries and churches. Also, in the Christian guest house where we stayed when in Beira, we met people such as an Anglo/Dutch couple who run an orphanage, an Egyptian water engineer and a German anthropologist working for the Wyclif Society on the oral transmission of the Bible in Mozambican languages.

On our first full day, Father Isaiah accompanied us on a tour of the city, driven by one of his parishioners. It has been an elegant city, with broad, tree-lined streets, but bears the marks



St. Barnabas Beira

of poverty, particularly in the pot-holed roads, which cause vehicles to weave alarmingly. We visited St George's

and another church in Father Isaiah's care, St Barnabas, Munhava, a township on the outskirts of the city, and were welcomed into the homes of some of his parishioners, joining with the family in prayer in one home for the mother who was sick. We visited two nursery schools, where we were entertained by the children's singing.

The next day we began a five day journey of nearly 1000 miles, in the company of Father Isaiah and Chris. Chris, who seemed indefatigable, did all the driving over some very



Chris Hemborough and friends

challenging roads. In the course of our journey we were to visit nine of the twenty-seven churches in Father Isaiah's care. One church we visited had its own priest, but the others were led by a deacon or a catechist. They are visited every few months by Father Isaiah, who usually travels by motor cycle, carrying a tent with him to sleep in, away from home around two weeks. Since our visit, two of the deacons we met have been ordained priest, which will have made the situation easier.

Firstly we drove northwards to the Zambezi, with reminders on the way of the fifteen year long civil war: derailed trains, uprooted track and, in the towns, buildings destroyed or pockmarked by bullets. At one point we made a detour from the road along a track to meet people working at the establishment of a new forestry enterprise by the church, with support from the church in Sweden, which will provide employment for local people and income for church work.

Arriving at Sena, the first of our overnight stops, we were met with a welcome that was quite overwhelming;



Welcome at Sena

and we were to meet many more such welcomes in the course of our journey. A crowd waiting at the roadside greeted us with singing and led us through the village to the church. We were given chairs in the sanctuary, while the congregation of around 300 sat on the tree-trunk pews, with the children on rush mats on the earthen floor. The Eucharist was celebrated by Fr Isaiah and Fr Domingo (Sena was the one place we visited with its own priest). The liturgy was familiar from its pattern and rhythm, although in the local language. The congregation's singing was really joyful and whole hearted - accompanied by drum and marimba. Father Isaiah's sermon was in Portuguese, translated by the deacon into the local language, and into whispered English, for our benefit, by Sarah, a young American of the Mennonite Church who was living and working in the village, helping to train Sunday School teachers. During the service, we were formally introduced, and responded with greetings from Friern Barnet. Afterwards, when darkness had fallen, Chris showed his film, the ministry of Jesus following St Luke's Gospel, dubbed into the local language, to an audience of 400 or so seated or standing under the stars, the projector powered by the generator (both carried in the Landrover). A similar pattern was repeated at other

places. Sometimes during the day we would stop at a church by the roadside, or off the road along a track. We would be met by the catechist and the people would gather, summoned by the bell, a piece of angle iron hanging from a tree. The Eucharist would be celebrated and greetings exchanged.



Memorial and Church at Zove

Our next overnight stop was Zove, site of the accident in 1998, where, built as a memorial to Berthe, there are now a



Inside the clinic at Zove

substantially built church, a clinic, a school and houses for deacon, nurse and two teachers. The clinic, with consulting room, maternity room and two-bed ward, is run by the nurse, who really serves also as GP and midwife. The school, solidly built with two classrooms, a staffroom, storage space and a headmaster's office, has windows and doors and desks for the



With the Head Teacher at Zove

children - in contrast to the government schools we saw in other villages, which had walls of woven brushwood, earthen floors and no furniture except blackboard and easel and tree trunks as seats. Class size, in Zove as elsewhere, was about 50, with two four hour shifts of children, but the same teachers. We saw some good teaching material and work of the children, but, for example, geography is taught without maps, geometry without instruments. There seems to be no other settlement there,



Setting up to show the "Jesus" film

but many live in the surrounding bush: the clinic had 300 patients last month and hundreds gathered to see the showing of the Jesus film. Some of the children walk a long way to get to

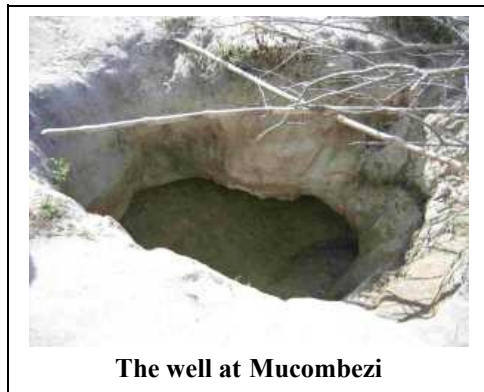


A new congregation near Zove

school; for there are two small houses for those unable to get home in the wet season. In the neighbourhood, new

congregations are forming – at one of our roadside stops the church building was so far a wooden skeleton, at another there was just a notice attached to a tree

We received very generous hospitality during our journey; typified by that at our last overnight stop at Mucombezi, a village about 5 km off the road, along a very rough and hilly track. The catechist took us for a walk through his crops of maize, cassava, paw-paw and bananas, and we saw their water



The well at Mucombezi

supply: water seeping into a pit dug in the bed of a dried up river, about 200 yards from the village. Nevertheless, that evening and again next morning we were provided with a bucket of hot water for washing. We were given a meal of maize, chicken and goat, killed in our honour. We ate this beside a wood fire lit for us on the earthen floor of the church as it was so cold that evening. This fire benefited also those of us who slept overnight in the church. It was still alight next morning for breakfast.

Next Sunday, back in Beira, we received at St George's the sort of welcome that had by now become familiar. There had been a Mothers' Union conference the previous week, and we were greeted outside the church by their singing. The Mothers' Union plays an important part in the life of the church. They have training before membership and are involved in such work as health education and family support. There is a corresponding

men's organisation, which undertakes repair and maintenance work. The service was perhaps rather more formal in the city; but there was the same enthusiasm in the worship, the same exuberant musical response of the congregation, accompanied by drum, marimba and tambourine.

We left Beira with lasting memories of the warmth of the welcome and the extraordinary generosity we had received from Christian people of a country impoverished by years of warfare and now coping with the threats of AIDS, and, at the time we were there, of drought. It is intended that the parish link will be developed further. In particular, steps are being taken to establish a link between the school in Zove and our church primary school.