

HENLEY BORAMA FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

President: The Mayor of Henley on Thames

Chairman; Malcolm Page

11 Cedar House

Ancastle Green

Henley on Thames

RG9 1UN.

REPORT TO THE 2019 TOWN MEETING

Introduction

The Association was formed in 1982 and, in that year the then Mayor, Dr Noel Snell visited Borama, accompanied by Miss Joanna Cary, then of the Henley Standard, to present a parchment of Association to the Mayor of Borama. In those days, the Mayor of Borama was an appointed government official.

Then, Borama was about the same size as Henley (20,000 residents approximately). The changes since that time have been dramatic, much affected by the Civil War of 1988-91, when the former British Protectorate broke free from the oppressive regime of President Mohamed Siad Barre, based on Mogadishu. Dr Noel Snell and I visited Borama in 1992, to see what could be done to assist Borama in the process of recovery. Fortunately, Borama had escaped the devastation that had overtaken neighbouring Hargeisa, where 60% of buildings had been destroyed by aerial bombing.

Our visit it was a great morale builder for the people of Borama, who were already embarked on their recovery programme, including re-building schools and establishing care homes for widows and widowers.

We did what we could, including arranging the supply of spares for the power station that Henley had funded some years before, but which, although just operational, was in urgent need of being up-dated. On return to UK we initiated a programme for the supply of spares, which were rapidly put to use. Later, the management of the Power Station passed from the Town Council to a private company, that brought about a significant increase in its capacity, leading to lights in homes, schools and shops - even streets.

Now, Borama far outstrips Henley in size. It has a population moving towards 350,000, two universities and one tertiary college that specialises in computer studies. Whether the water supply can sustain further growth is a cause for concern, The town draws its water from ten deep wells that were drilled by the Chinese some 50 years ago, at Amoud, where the older University now is. OXFAM refurbished the pump house after the civil war.

There is now a significant population of Boramans in the UK, in cities such as London, Birmingham and Cardiff. Henley is fairly central to these groups and we have been able to hold events under the heading 'Borama Comes to Henley'. Initially they were in the Town Square, but later moved to Mill Meadows -where we propose to hold this year's event. We are unable to have a fixed date each year because of the annual change of the date of Ramadan, which is linked to the phase of the moon and moves back by 11 days each year.

The Way Ahead

Just as were we were wondering whether there was still a role for us in the face of Borama's progress, last year Borama was struck by a cyclone that was of an enormous scale, resulting in the deaths of some 150 people and prodigious numbers of animals,

particularly sheep and goats. Thanks to the involvement of Henley Rotary, over £500 was raised and was sent to Borama through the good offices of the UK-registered charity SAMASONS RELIEF (Reg No 1144235). The money went primarily to the women of Borama, to enable them to re-establish their flocks. I should explain that the men look after camels, whereas sheep and goats are the province of the women, brought into marriage and, in the event of divorce, moving out with her and her children. We are most grateful to the Rotarians for their support.

There is still a role for HBFA, particularly in conjunction with SAMASONS RELIEF. We look forward to the next Borama Comes to Henley event in Mill Meadows on the afternoon of Saturday 13th July, particularly as last year's event was curtailed on the advice of the Mayor of Borama as the town was in mourning following the losses caused by the cyclone.

We also look forward to Dr Harvey Smith (of Emmer Green) joining us. He has visited Borama on a number of occasions and is well known to Professor Suliman Gulaid, the President of Amoud University.

We also continue to keep in touch with other prominent Somalis and had the good fortune to be visited recently by Dr Edna Adan Ismail the founder, principal funder and now the Chancellor of The Edna Adan University Hospital, and Mrs Rhoda Ibrahim, who is director of a London-based Somali charity. Dr Edna was in the UK to receive her fourth honorary PhD; she is also a Fellow of Cardiff University and holds the Legion d'Honneur (France) and a decoration from the Government of Djibouti. Radio 4 listeners may have heard her on Desert Island Discs or Start the Week.

We are grateful to Town Council staff who have helped to organise the Borama Comes to Henley event in 2017 and the fundraising in 2018.

For the last three years I have had the pleasure of the invaluable help of Councillor Jane Smewing, who quickly improved both financial assistance and relations with the Council. Jane is leaving the Council shortly and will be greatly missed. Her contribution has been invaluable.

Malcolm Page
Chairman, HBFA