

News from Around the World

This month's newsletter features one of our members who has recently been privileged to travel to another part of the world. **Elaine Willmore** was invited by the BBC to take part in a documentary on the work of Traidcraft, a Gateshead based company for whom she is a local volunteer. Traidcraft import, and then sell on, 'fair trade' products from developing countries. Elaine's documentary featured an all-expenses paid visit to Bangladesh. The programmes she appears in can be downloaded from the BBC's Look North website:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/default.stm>.

(Click on the *BBC Look North* link, or on the *Traidcraft* link).

To Bangladesh for Traidcraft

"My trip started with me feeling excited but apprehensive- I wasn't sure what to expect. When we were waiting to board the plane at Heathrow airport, I noticed lots of ladies dressed in very beautiful and colourful saris and I started to think about how different it was all going to be when I got there.

I was right! After exiting Dhaka airport, we stepped outside into intense heat and a big wall of people held back behind a big fence, waiting for people to arrive. My first impression was one of chaos! Rickshaws, overloaded buses and old cars were using a 'free for all' rule with a cacophony of horns beeping. The hotel, Lake Castle, was wonderful: air-conditioned, clean and full of friendly faces eager to help.

I had my first taste of Bengali food in the hotel and it was absolutely delicious, not necessarily hot and spicy, but full of flavour and aromatic. The hotel was surrounded by palm trees and a lake; it looked lush and beautiful.

Unfortunately, the first trip out (to 'old' Dhaka) painted a very different picture, since the streets were dusty and dirty and many people were begging. The street market was hectic and full of vivid colours, but I noticed that the materials were being sold at very cheap prices.

We all enjoyed a boat trip, which gave us a real taste of river life in Bangladesh. The river was a hive of activity, with people bathing, scrubbing clothes, transporting goods and fishing. One of the things we saw was upsetting, because people were carrying very



Elaine and Melissa

heavy loads of clay, using baskets to balance it on their heads. It looked like really hard, tiring work in the baking heat.

By contrast, my next trip to the Juteworks building was quite different. It is a fantastic new building covered in beautiful terracotta bricks and inside it is very modern and well equipped. Many of the staff had internet access and mobile phones. It seemed very efficient, businesslike and well organised.



We also joined together with all of the staff and had lunch, (eating curry with fingers is a bit tricky!) and had a guided tour.

I was really pleased to see that a lot of the staff have images of Jesus on their desks. I talked to one of the ladies called Shanti, who told me that they have prayer meetings every morning. They give the day to God and let him take over and they totally trust in Him. Shanti read me a passage from 1 Corinthians 13 all about love, and what I saw was that love expressed all around.

There was a very happy group of ladies working in a nice environment; they looked relaxed but also they were busy and industrious too. They were doing quality control checks on familiar items - terracotta pots and jute bags. These workers were really benefiting from being able to work and earn a proper wage.

One of our trips was a shopping expedition and where better to go than to a fair trade shop, Aarong. I bought some traditional outfits that would blend in well in the villages, and also help keep me cool.

The trip to Sinobah was amazing. This was the rural Bangladesh that I really hoped to see, a green and beautiful village surrounded by jackfruit trees. We were greeted by 120 schoolchildren who sang for us and gave us flowers. Meeting the ladies who actually made the hammocks was inspirational. They were very

warm and friendly and they seemed really pleased to meet us, and they even let me have a go at jute weaving.

It was a privilege to sit with these ladies and spend time with them. Although we're a world apart and didn't speak the same language, we communicated using body and sign language. We talked about our



children. They looked at my jewellery and laughed at how white my skin was. The one message that the ladies asked me to pass on was; "please buy more hammocks and jute products". Selling their hammocks through *Traidcraft* has allowed these women to give up manual jobs with very long hours to work instead in the village, with their children and friends nearby, but most importantly with the dignity they deserve, and a fair wage for the work that they do. These scenes were to me a world apart from the poor traders in the old streets of old Dhaka.

We also visited Swajan in central Dhaka, where handmade cards (of which I've sold a lot back at Church) are put together. It was good to see the whole production line and special skills of the ladies who were sewing. Again, I talked to them and gave them a photograph of my family. Some ladies had their own children sitting alongside them and together they looked very content. The ladies talked about how they enjoyed the work environment at Swajan. They got mutual support and friendship working together and, once again, I had a very positive impression of how the working conditions of this group of women had really been improved by fair trade.

My last day in Dhaka included a 7 hour round trip in a cramped, hot van to the Bonoful workshop where I saw the whole process of handmade paper production. What really struck me was the resourcefulness here, nothing is wasted and everything is recycled. Raw materials include jute that's not good enough for weaving and

cotton off-cuts from garment making. All these are shredded into a pulp, then pressed into bamboo frames to make sheets of paper. These can then be coloured or textured to give the paper its real handmade characteristics. The real beauty of this paper is that each sheet is unique, I guess, and this results in handmade cards that are very special. All the ladies here are busy but in a good working environment, once again based around teamwork which seems to work really well here in Bangladesh.



This trip has really fired my enthusiasm even more and I hope I can sell even more of these products. It is one thing reading success stories in the catalogue and on the website, but coming out to Bangladesh and seeing everything for real brings it all to life for me. I had a wonderful time, have learned a lot, seen a lot, experienced a lot, and it's all reiterated for me that fair trade really is the way forward." – Elaine Willmore

News Round Up

- Congratulations to **Jens Rahmann and Sietske Bouma** who were married in the Church on Saturday 5th May. We wish them well in their new life together as Mr and Mrs Rahmann!
- We will be celebrating **Pentecost** with an **All-age Service** on **Sunday 27th May, at 11.00am.**
- You are warmly invited to our annual **IREF fundraising barbecue**, at the Hunt's home, on **Monday 28th May, 12 noon – 2.00pm** (weather permitting).

David Hunt