

LOOKING BACK

By MIKE PETTY



New food shops badly needed

>> FROM THE NEWS, 1986
Mill Road could do with more shops, residents say. It is an important shopping centre, especially for convenience foods. Key groups such as the elderly, people with young children and those without cars depend on it. But many are dissatisfied with the range of goods available. During the past few years a number have closed down or been put to other uses. One has become a one-armed bandit amusement arcade.

Novel uses for stately homes

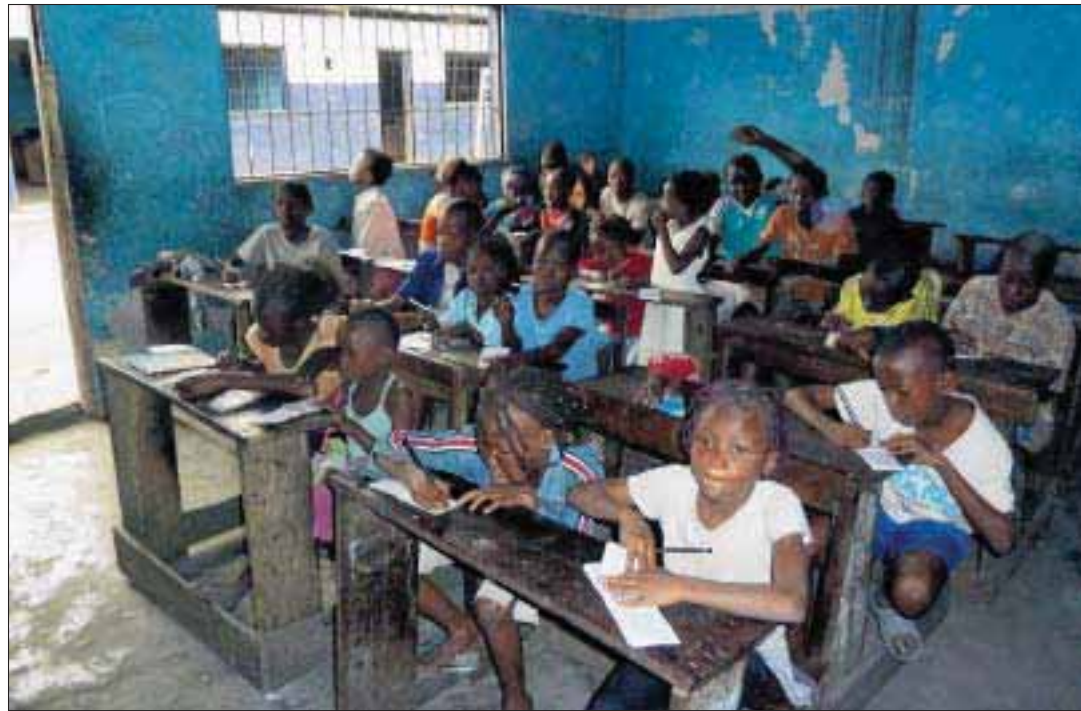
>> FROM THE NEWS, 1961
With taxation problems and death duties, many stately homes are being turned into business premises. Abington Hall was a private residence for a Mr Bertrand who surrendered it to the Army during the war, it is now the British Welding Research Association. Lord Inchcape left Chesterford Park in 1918; it became the Jewish Home for Incurables and is now Fison's Pest Control research centre. The mansion at Study Camps houses thousands of chickens, having been acquired by Lyddite Chicks in 1949.

Lamp-lighter role to be snuffed out

>> FROM THE NEWS, 1936
Cambridge street lighting is being brought up to standard. Hills Road and St Andrew's Street are already ablaze. So is Sidney Street. Twenty-three miles of streets will be illuminated by autumn. Side lights properly equipped with seven watt bulbs are all that are now required by motorists. Pedestrians and cyclists are now visible from afar after dark. The lamps are lit automatically by clock devices and soon the familiar figure of the lamp-lighter will disappear from the streets forever.

Royal portraits are unveiled

>> FROM THE NEWS, 1911
Carlton's Coronation celebrations began with a service in the church, after which the schoolchildren and many parents adjourned to the schoolroom for the unveiling of the portraits of the King and Queen presented by the county council. Coronation mugs or plates were presented before all sat down to an excellent tea in Mr Nice's barn. During the evening a programme of sports was carried out and the proceedings concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.



Changing lives in a land r

The story of Theodore Menelik-Mfuni – who fled his war-torn homeland and, against all odds, built a successful m... dedicates his time to helping those less fortunate than himself – and is inspiring others to do the same. EMMA HIGGINS

Jenny's gift set to help those with disabilities

THIS week, Theodore has taken some rather special equipment to help disabled children in the DRC – a wheelchair and a laptop donated by Sally's daughter Jenny, 19.

Born prematurely at 25 weeks, Jenny has cerebral palsy, hydrocephalus, visual impairment and mild learning difficulties. She's spent many years in and out of hospital, and is reliant on a wheelchair.

Now a student at the Royal National College for the Blind in Hereford, she's only too happy to help.

"I have been through a lot in my life, but I've been very lucky to have been able to go to good schools and have really



THOUGHTFUL: Jenny Nott is giving equipment to Theodore's charity

good care whenever I have been in hospital – and when I have been at home recovering," says Jenny.

"I know that children in the DRC do not have the same chances that I have had. I wouldn't be alive today if I had been born in Kinshasa.

"I'm lucky to have had

wheelchairs and computers to help me, and I know that disabled children don't have this, so I wanted to give one of my old wheelchairs and old laptop to the charity so that they could be used by someone who has not been as fortunate as I have."

ARRIVING from the Congo as a refugee in the late 80s, Theodore Menelik-Mfuni's future didn't look promising. Barely able to speak English and away from his parents for the first time, life was, he admits, a struggle.

Yet today Theodore runs Menelik Education, a hugely successful charity that helps deprived communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and this week he's back with two new projects.

"Maybe I'm crazy, I'm not sure," laughs Theodore. "But I enjoy it; it's absolutely fantastic."

The Cambridge-based charity has its roots in Theodore's own thirst for education. Soon after arriving in the UK, he took whatever jobs he could – from window cleaning to working on building sites – to fund his college courses. And it paid off: after earning a degree and an MA, he went on to become a lecturer.

But a visit to his mother in the DRC eight years ago changed everything. Seeing children playing barefoot in the dust instead of going to school, Theodore vowed to help them to get an education, initially by refurbishing a school, and Menelik Education

was born.

Since then, the charity has grown beyond recognition. Encompassing several schools, a resources centre, teacher training programmes, regeneration projects and healthcare clinics, it reaches thousands of people in the most deprived areas of the country's capital, Kinshasa.

"Initially I was just thinking 'well, I can help a few of them go to school', but I never thought it would actually suck me in and get me involved to this extent," says the father-of-two. "With the very little money we have, we've managed to do an incredible amount of work; I'm absolutely thrilled."

Theodore visits the DRC every three months, and returns this week to set up the country's first Citizens Advice Bureau.

He had the idea after people began to turn to him with their legal problems, including a woman who'd been brutally beaten by her husband. "He nearly blinded her, but he wasn't charged with anything – he had the money and got away with it, and she ended up with a scar for life," he explains.

"The major barrier for most of them is financial. To go to court costs a lot of money, and if they're living in deprived areas, which nearly 90 per cent of the population are, it's almost

an impossible mission."

The new Bureau is mainly aimed at women and those with disabilities, and Theodore accepts it's a daunting prospect: "it's still dangerous to mix with this sort of thing: just last year a human rights activist was killed in the Congo. But our approach is different, we try and change the system from within, and hopefully don't antagonise anybody."

Theodore's other new challenge is to get disabled children – who are normally ostracised by the Congolese – into the classroom.

But to do that he'll have to change people's attitudes: not an easy task, as the discrimination stems from deep-rooted religious beliefs. "Charlatans tell these families that they are being punished by God," explains Theodore. "So in an uneducated family they start treating the child as a little devil. They have less and less contact with that child, and very often they are thrown out of the house."

And again, money can be a factor: "For a lot of families disabled children cost too much money, because they have to be looked after. And because they can't afford it these children end up in the street.

"With every school that we've worked with, I'd never once seen a child

with a disability, well, suggests they're somewhere hidden adds.

"So we're trying to get into the community, to get them to the school, to raise awareness. We're going to send a very clear message that there's 'them' and 'us', it's all together."

But to do all this the charity desperately needs donations. Theodore does what he can – particularly with the legendary dance performances he holds in Cambridge, which has even remortgaged his house. "If we get more money, we will be able to reach more people and make a real, real difference."

Helping Theodore with the fundraising is Sally Nott, a charity worker and volunteer for Menelik Education in her spare time.

Sally met Theodore at one of his fundrais

Count

■ The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in central Africa, is the largest country, 9 million times the size of the UK.

■ In spite of the rich resources, nearly 90 per cent of Congolese live in poverty, with little access to education or health care.



DISPUTE: Far left, Menelik Education volunteer Sally Nott with children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Left, her class and above, some donated boots are warmly received

avaged by war

ew life in Cambridge – is extraordinary enough. But now he
GGINBOTHAM meets him.

parties. "Talking to him about the project, it just captured my imagination. The more I heard, the more determined I was to help."

Visiting the DRC for the first time last year, where she helped other volunteers run a summer school, was, she says, "a wonderful experience."

"From the minute I stepped off the aeroplane I loved every minute, and didn't want to come home. There's a tremendous amount of warmth from everyone, and great joy. The children are so full of energy and so appreciative of everything, because they have absolutely nothing at all."

One thing that particularly struck Sally was the poor state of the school where she taught: "the benches were falling to pieces, there were holes in the ceiling, the plaster was peeling off the walls. . . that really brought things home."

"And the hygiene! The toilets are absolutely rife with illness and infection. It's just horrendous, and you've got little 2-year-old children running around in open sewers in some places. It would never happen in this country, but it's par for the course out there."

Having a daughter of her own with multiple disabilities has also spurred Sally on: "If Jenny had been born in the Congo she'd have died, and if she'd survived her life would've been nothing. She'd have been stuck in a corner, quite literally."

"We've benefited from so much here, and there's so little there, so for me it's about wanting to put something back, and trying to make a difference."

Thankfully Menelik Education's work clearly is making a difference, so much so that when Theodore was interviewed by a TV station during his last visit, they suggested he

should become the country's president. "I said 'it's not something I've been thinking about, but it's not something I'd rule out!'" he laughs. "So we'll see . . ."

But even if he never makes it to the heady heights of the presidency, Theodore is happy to keep helping where he can. "There's nothing more rewarding than making a positive change in other people's lives," he smiles. "It's a fantastic feeling."

■ For more information, visit www.menelikpartnership.org or call (01223) 769300.

We're going to send a very loud message that there is not a 'them' and 'us', it's us together
– Theodore Menelik-Mfuni



>> in Brief

Violence threat man remanded

A MAN has pleaded guilty to putting a person in fear of violence during an incident in Mildenhall.

Appearing at Ipswich Crown Court, Ali Sourani, 28, admitted the offence, which took place in Selwyn Close on April 2, 2010.

Sourani, of Raingate Street, Bury St Edmunds, pleaded not guilty to three other charges which the court heard were not being proceeded with by the Crown Prosecution Service.

Judge John Devaux told Sourani he would remain in custody until he is sentenced on July 29.

Wall pushed over by jobs

VANDALS pushed over a wall outside a home.

The victim discovered the damage in Sandwich Road, St Neots, at 9.30am on Sunday.

It is thought the damage was caused just before midnight on Saturday.

Contact Pc Jon Marshall on 0345 4564564 or Crimestoppers, anonymously, on 0800 5551111 if you saw any suspicious activity.

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Church rings the changes

CHURCH bells and the clock have been removed from St James' Church in Little Paxton for refurbishment.

The bells are being restored by Taylors of Loughborough and the clock is being worked on by Smiths of Derby.

Work is expected to be completed by November.

Make a date for screening

OSTEOPOROSIS screening will be available at Royston Town Hall.

The preventative and non-invasive test for the condition, which affects half of all women over the age of 50, is not yet routinely available on the NHS but will be offered on Tuesday, July 12 for £22.

It will take place from 9am until 1pm. For further information and to make an appointment, call 0845 224 6784.

ry in crisis from violence and disease

- Unrest in the country dates back to the 1960s when, formerly a Belgian colony, it gained independence and a political crisis ensued.
- Fuelled by the country's mineral wealth, the Second Congo War (1998 to 2003) left millions dead – it's thought to be the deadliest conflict since the Second World War.
- The conflict has left the country in the grip of a humanitarian crisis: every month thousands of Congolese still die from disease and famine.
- In 2006 the DRC held its first multi-party elections since independence in 1960. Joseph Kabila was sworn in as president.
- The situation remains unstable, and the eastern regions in particular are still beset by violence.