

BROMLEY & SHEPPARD'S COLLEGES



Herald

Ghana Extra Edition

2025



A special extra edition of the Herald, after a fascinating visit!

Valerie's Ghana Diary – March 3rd - 13th '25

Monday 3rd March

Andrew, George and I left College at 8.30am by taxi, en route for London Gatwick Airport. The day was very cold with hoar frost on the ground – so we were hoping for better things!

We met the rest of the group, Liz, Andrew's sister, Grace, Richard and Sue and Andy. We lost each other going through security but met up again. The flight was delayed and we were sitting waiting, then suddenly an announcement came that the gate was open and would be closing soon! So Andrew, Liz and I had a good exercise workout dashing to the gate!



We had a good flight until we were approaching Accra when we encountered a storm and had quite a bit of turbulence which was quite uncomfortable, but the landing was good and without incident. We were told that the temperature was 32 degrees!

We felt welcome straight away as Regina, who works at the airport and is the daughter of a friend of Andrew's, met us and helped us negotiate our way through. David, the brother of Andrew's friend, Ebenezer, also met us and we met the driver of our mini-bus, who was called Emmanuel (which proved to be a very appropriate name!).

It was a relatively short distance to our first hotel, The Regency Grove Coconut Hotel, where we were greeted with coconuts and drank the cool, refreshing coconut milk – a lovely welcome!

We went to our rooms and freshened up and met at the bar to talk about the next day.

Tuesday 4th March

Had a good breakfast – omelette, fresh fruit and yoghurt, then set off to drive to Cape Coast where we were going to stay for three nights.

The first thing that struck me on the journey were the many street markets with people selling their wares on the side of the street and also the way the people (mostly women) were carrying large loads of food and other things on their heads.

We could not obtain the local currency, Cedis, in England, so we stopped en route at a money-changer to change the Sterling we had bought with us. 100 cedis were about £5, so we finished up with large wedges of notes. It was a bit unnerving using an ATM later when asking for 1,000 cedis (just over £50) and hoping it didn't mean £1,000!



We stopped en route for a mid-morning drink and I tried a coffee, after which I opted for cold drinks! Arriving at Cape Coast, we went to a Café overlooking the shore, called Cape Coast Beachside Café, which had stunning views of the coast and the Atlantic waves breaking on the shore.

We had our first experience of slow service, but eventually all had a good meal while enjoying the lovely views.

We pressed on and called in to the local bishop, Victor Atta-Bafoe, who welcomed us warmly, inviting us into his Chapel, giving us cool



drinks and telling us about the Anglican Church in the area. Like so many of the clergy we met, Andrew had had some responsibility for some of his early training as a priest and he was clearly pleased to see Andrew again.

Andrew told him that I was a priest and he said that there were three women priests in his diocese, but that not all dioceses ordained women.

We finally arrived at our destination , out in the country, called Hans Cottage Botel. It was an extraordinary place with two lakes and many birds to see and including resident crocodiles! There were Weaver Birds of three different types who built intricate nests in the trees and they were accompanied by white Egrets, larger dove-like birds, and between them they made quite a noise! Our rooms were in blocks in the grounds and the restaurant had open sides with beautiful views of the surrounding water.

We met to talk about the plans for the next day and then settled in.

Ash Wednesday 5th March

We set off at 9.30am to travel to Cape Coast Castle, which had been a slave-holding place before they were shipped to their destinations. This was one of the largest slave-holding centres in the world during the Colonial era, where Ghanaians, many of whom were traded to the British by the Ashanti people for alcohol and guns, were kept before being crammed into merchant ships and deported for a life of captive labour. The dungeons are a grim and sobering place where many men were

crammed together, (the women in separate dungeons) in foul conditions with little light and air. There were three dungeons, the oldest built before 1790. The large doors in the courtyard, which led to the shore, was labelled 'Door of No Return', as those who passed through had little or no hope of ever returning. However, a few years ago a symbolic invitation was given to the descendants of slaves which saw them return through 'The Door of No Return', effectively breaking the chain. There is a sign now on the other side of the door saying 'Door of Return' and we had a group photo there. President Barak Obama and Michelle Obama visited there in 2004.

We were given an extensive tour of the place with many harrowing details, including the fact that many of the slaves had never seen the sea before and were prone to jumping in the sea from the canoes ferrying them to the merchant ships, preferring drowning to a sea voyage.

We were shown the Governor's House, which by contrast, was large, light and airy, and the Anglican Church on the sight which had a spy-hole through which those going into church could see the slaves held below. After this visit we continued to a lovely fishing village Elmina, which had another slave-holding castle, although we only saw this from the outside. We had a snack lunch there, accompanied by little lizards scuttling about (think Death in Paradise!). We were told that the Spring Rolls were available instantly but the other dishes would take at least half an hour.... Well, the Spring Rolls took over half an hour – so no telling how long the other food would have taken! After a short walk on the beach we

returned to our hotel and some of us had a swim in the pool.

In the evening we set off for the 6pm Ash Wednesday Service at Cape Coast Cathedral, which was our first experience of worship there. We were warmly



welcomed and Andrew and Valerie robed and were in the sanctuary with the Dean and other clergy. It was a very lively affair and there were indeed 'smells and bells' with clouds of incense enthusiastically provided by one of the thurifers throughout the Eucharistic Prayer. At the Consecration a ring of lights lit up behind the altar. The liturgy was modern language 1662, mostly in English, but the Sermon was mainly in the local language. At the beginning of the Service we made a presentation of 1,000 hosts and these were used during the Eucharist. One thing we were surprised about was that the people were communicated with small cups rather than from the Chalice.

As we were processing out ,all of a sudden, the lights went out, and we were thrust into darkness! Power cuts were a feature of our stay in Ghana and we experienced them on a number of occasions.

We returned to the hotel and had an evening meal in the hotel restaurant – and so to bed.

**Thursday 6th
March
Independence
Day – Public
Holiday**

Five of us left after breakfast to go to the Kakum National Park to walk along the Canopy Walk which is up in the trees up to 40m above the forest floor. We were mainly focussing on walking along and didn't get a lot of chance to look around, but we saw



some lovely butterflies. We paid 20 cedis to get into the park (about £1) and then 130 cedis (£5-£6) to go along the walkway. We had a guide to take us up and he assured us that it was safe! We could either go on a longer walk or a shorter one and we chose the longer one and were not disappointed. When we returned to the bottom there were masses of schoolchildren around waiting to go up as it was a National Holiday, so we were glad we'd gone early. We had our photo taken in front of the notice saying we'd survived the walkway!

The other three had had a relaxing time at the hotel and we had time to turn around before going back into the town of Cape Coast and being able to look around, having a drink looking out at the shore and all the colourful fishing boats. After some free time we relaxed together before the evening meal. Sue told me that she'd seen a crocodile beside the lake, so we set off to have a look. It was about 6 feet away, but I was able to take a good



photograph. It's been called Saddam. While we were still sitting there we suddenly saw another one coming out of the bush and sliding into the lake – so saw two crocodiles in one evening!

We had our evening meal and then relaxed for a while before heading for bed.

Friday 7th March

We packed up and left at about 9am en route for Kumasi via Beckwai. The route took longer than Andrew had anticipated, partly because of the state of the roads, and we arrived about half an hour after we thought. We met another old student of Andrew's – the Vicar of St. Francis' Church who greeted us very warmly. We were going to come back to his church on Sunday and Andrew, George and I were going to robe and take part in the Eucharist, which will be at 9am on Sunday. He took us to a place out of town for a snack meal and we sat outside in a garden to eat it somewhat overwhelmed by the loud music being played!

We then set off for Kumasi, the second-biggest city in Ghana, and where Andrew lived most of the time he was there, arriving at the Presbyterian guest house at about 3pm. This was much simpler than the other places we'd stayed in, but its advantage was the proximity of everything in the centre of the city.

After unpacking Andrew took us on a tour of the local area and some of us were able to use a local ATM.

That evening we went out to a Chinese restaurant which was very pleasant. The whole meal, including drinks was only about the equivalent of £13 each.

Saturday 8th March

Helena, the sister-in-law of Andrew's friend Ebenezer, came to show us around. She took us to some material shops and gift shops. Most of us bought some gifts and

enjoyed seeing what was on offer. We went on to a large market area which was buzzing with crowds of people. One of the dimensions that we had to be careful about was the state of the pavements which had steps, pot-holes and drainage holes in unexpected places! Helena also took us to see her pottery workshop where there were some beautiful pots – but too large to bring home! We stopped for a cold drink and as we were walking back I realised I had left a new bag with my purchases in it at the shop! Emmanuel came to the rescue and retrieved it for me!

We then went to the Cultural Centre which has many workshops with local crafts and a museum which was very interesting. We had some lunch and cool drinks there which was a welcome restorative after walking around in the heat.

We then went on to the Anglican Cathedral which is very distinctive on the sky-line in Kumasi. It is a very modern, spacious and beautiful place. A young woman was singing at the front and she sang for us, which was a real treat and very moving. The Dean appeared and greeted us before we returned to the guest house prior to going out for an Indian meal.

There were two features of that evening. One was a group of children having a birthday party finishing with everyone clapping when cakes with candles appeared and singing 'Happy Birthday' and the other was yet another power cut! I was also amused to see in most public restaurants that football was on the TV! We had a good meal, but it was a long wait. Then home to bed.

Sunday 9th March – 1st Sunday in Lent

We left soon after breakfast, at 8am, to go to the 9am Eucharist at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Beckwai, about 50 minutes journey south of Kumasi. We met the Vicar, Fr Kweku Abiw-Abaidoo, on our way up to Kumasi. Andrew, George and I robed and assisted at the Service. George read the Gospel, Grace, who is a Lay Reader at St Laurence Church, read the first Lesson, Andrew preached and I blessed the group bringing up the Offertory, which was more like Harvest Festival than just



the usual Bread and Wine, as the Parish Clergy have no stipend and have to have other jobs and rely on people giving them gifts.

The Service was in High Anglican style, with again, loads of incense, and a plethora of servers and acolytes all dressed in immaculate uniforms. At one point two little girl acolytes came past me (aged about 10) in red dresses with white veils, carrying their candles and doing a slow walk.

There was a branch with three Offertory bowls in the middle of the aisle and people danced down the aisle to put their gifts in. At one point the whole congregation, including the clergy, were dancing in the aisles waving our hankies in the air (I have a video clip of this!) and during the Eucharistic prayer, at the 'Hosanna', everyone again began waving their hankies in the air and the priests waved the purificators.

After Communion, the Notices went on for about 20 minutes! Definitely 'long Church'!

There was a mix of English and local language, but everything was done with great enthusiasm. Once again Andrew presented them with some Communion hosts, which they were very pleased with.

We were given lunch after the Service before we set off back to Kumasi.

After a free afternoon, we went out to The Lancaster Hotel for an evening meal, at which our driver, Emmanuel and Helena joined us. It was a buffet meal, so not the usual wait to be served and we had a while before sitting on the terrace by the pool, which was very relaxing.

Monday 10th March

We set off on a two-hour journey to Mampong, in the hills North of Kumasi, to visit a Baby Home called St Monica's which had been started by the Anglican Order of the Holy Paraclete Sisters (based at Whitby, England). They had set up the Home as some of the Sisters were

midwives and many mothers died in childbirth and their families struggled to look after them.

The Pre-School Unit is now on the Educational Site founded by the Sisters, which includes a Junior and Secondary School and a Teacher-Training Unit. The Baby Home is now run by a priest called Hannah (who is also a Parish Priest) and is under the management of the Anglican Diocese of Kumasi with the Bishop as Chairman.

Today, the children arrive at the Home as a result of various health, social and economic circumstances including abandonment, neglect and severe poverty. Hannah explained that they stay until either they can return to their extended family or be fostered or adopted if that is not possible. She told us that recently two children had had to return as their placement had broken down and she was fostering them for the time being.

Hannah told us that they had difficulty recruiting Staff and needed charitable donations as the funding from the Diocese was insufficient. We gave them a donation and some gifts for the children and decided that we would have a Charity Coffee Morning at College to support them.

After looking round, including seeing the Chapel where the Sisters used to live, we went into Mampong and visited the Cathedral which was dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels. We were warmly welcomed by the Dean.

Next we saw the Amaniampong Silver Stool Palace, home of the Mampongahene , chief of Mampong .

We then returned to St Monica's where Hannah provided us with lunch- an omelette and chips, followed by the most divine mangoes which had fallen off the very large tree in their garden! We also saw the bungalow where Andrew had lived for about 18 months.

The drive to and from Mampong gave us an experience of different scenery as we climbed up into hills and could see for miles around.

On the way back we called in at Bonwire Weaving, which was an amazing sight of brightly woven cloth and we could see some of the weavers at work. One of the features were bracelets and book marks which could have names woven into them while we waited. Some of us bought these and other lengths which could be used as table cloths or place mats.

We returned for our last night in Kumasi and as we were setting off to go to for our evening meal, the sky darkened, the wind got up and lightning lit up the sky, so we thought a storm was coming. Fortunately, although it started to rain on the way, the main torrential rain waited until we were at the restaurant and had finished by the time we walked back to the guest house.

Tuesday 11th March

We set off after breakfast en route for Accra. We were on a cross-country route, some of which had poor roads. We stopped briefly for some refreshments and then carried on to the nearest thing to a motorway service

station, called Linda Dor where we had lunch and a cold drink for about 20 cedis.

Continuing on, we went into the hills with stunning views of Accra and the coast beneath us. On the way into Accra we visited the Botanical Gardens, which were very interesting as we had an enthusiastic guide who told us a lot about the various trees that we could see there. For example, he showed us what would happen if he rubbed the leaves of a teak tree between his fingers. It released a red dye which looked like blood and he told us that this was in fact used to treat anaemia. We also saw a Quinine tree (the leaves actually tasted like the quinine tonic water!). He said that the locals would use this as anti-malarial medicine. We also saw the Strangler Ficus Tree, which had completely enclosed and killed another tree whose outline could be seen within the trunk of the surrounding tree. We also saw the Lady Knutsford Tree which was a Silk Cotton Tree and which had finally died after 600 years. Finally we saw the 'Tree of Life' which had intricately carved images of aspects of human life.

So, arriving back at the Regency Coconut Hotel we were once again given the treat of some chilled coconut milk to drink.

We settled in for our last two nights, having drinks and a leisurely meal.

Wednesday 12th March

Coming to breakfast I met a Ghanaian woman called Hannah, who turned out to be there with Adisa and Frank who were from the Ministry of Education and were

using the Conference facilities to do some training for parents about how to help their children when they start school.

Our first visit that day was to a Safari Park which we drove round and in which we saw Zebra, Storks and Antelopes. The most enjoyable aspect was seeing the Baboons running around in the midst of the reception area with their babies clinging to them.



Then we continued up to the stunning Volta Dam where we had lunch by the beautiful lake. This had been built by President Nkrumah at the height of his powers to provide electricity for the



whole of Ghana. We were able to go to a viewing platform at a local hotel before we left to see the full view of the stunning dam. Unfortunately the Dam does not provide all the electricity needed today and, as I

have said, we experienced a number of power cuts during our time in Ghana.

On returning to the hotel we had a relaxing afternoon and had dinner in the hotel.

Thursday 13th March

Our last full day. We walked through part of the city – which is a mixture of modern capital city with large buildings, including the President's Palace, and the usual street markets which are everywhere. And as we were driving along we saw a man on the back of a motorbike with a goat across his lap!

We went to the memorial building to President Nkrumah and were able to see various artefacts about his life and presidency. We also saw a statue which had been beheaded by a mob who were protesting about his rule during the latter part of his presidency when he fell out of favour.

On the site was also a cultural market selling various locally crafted produce and an art gallery of local pictures.

We called in at the Anglican Cathedral but couldn't go inside as there was a funeral being conducted there.



As it was our last day we were able to freshen up and prepare for going to the airport for the return over-night journey. We said farewell to our faithful driver, Emmanuel and also farewelled Andrew who was staying for another week to see some old friends.

As far as I am concerned it certainly lived up to my expectations as we saw a good variety of the land and culture and with the careful organisation and local knowledge that Andrew had we had a very memorable and special experience.

I happen to have spoken to two Nigerian women since I returned home and said that I experienced Ghana as 'colourful, loud, chaotic and slow'– and they both said Nigeria was more so!

Valerie Pearce (who also took the photos!)
Ask Valerie to see more of her wonderful photos.





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