



Bridget Cowper-Coles

Being the wife of the British Ambassador may bring certain privileges. But watching the world go by, whilst doing nothing to help it along, is not among the options chosen by Bridget Cowper-Coles.

Having heard of the needs of the children of Iraq, and recognising that even on our own doorstep there may be a local requirement to help those less fortunate; Mrs Cowper-Coles has sparked a few ideas among the community in Riyadh for a number of fund raising events.

The RGBB has been asked to assist with the organising of a couple of them, but more about that later. First a flavour of what has already been achieved in the land to the north, to serve hopefully as a driver for our own activities.

(Many readers may recognise that the Dianne Wilton mentioned is indeed wife of Chris, both former residents of Riyadh)

THE BRITISH LADIES SOCIETY TRAIL BLAZE HUMANITARIAN AID PROJECTS IN IRAQ!

By BLS President, Janet Hubbard

The British Ladies Society, under the patronage of Mrs Dianne Wilton, wife of the British Ambassador to Kuwait, has made a significant impact on the humanitarian drive for children in need in Iraq, particularly in the Maysan area of Basra. It is hoped that the projects identified, will ultimately assist the Iraqi communities in redefining their own initiative and creativity. The venture began as a joint project with Society members Sara and Summer Al-Awadhi and the Kuwait for Kids Group. Having successfully delivered 3000 school bags for school children in Umm Qasr and Southern Basra during the aftermath of the war in Iraq, with the help of the British Army and the Humanitarian Operations Centre (HOC) in Kuwait, the ladies have since concentrated on specific projects that have been identified with the help of the British Military in Iraq. The excitement written on the faces of the children who received the gifts of school bags containing useful school equipment and everyday personal items will remain indelibly printed on the memories of those who went to Basra at the end of May to deliver them. It is the hope in the eyes of the shoeless children who waved from the grey, dusty streets and on the faces of the mothers carrying their young children, whose lips were dry from lack of water, which encourages the commitment from this group of dedicated ladies.

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Mrs Wilton hosted a charity fund-raising Coffee Morning for 250 ladies in June, with the specific aim of raising funds to help equip the many schools that were identified as in desperate need of refurbishment in the Basra area. Sergeant Rachel Webster and her colleague Captain Monica Clutson, both of the Royal Military Police who were based at the Command and Military Operations Centre (CMOC) in Basra, attended the coffee morning and gave an inspirational talk about their work with the school children in Basra and the visit to the Al Sai School in Basra made by representatives of the BLS. Rachel was thanked in person by the British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair who also visited the refurbished school in the Al Sai Province. A total of KD19000 was raised as a result of the Coffee Morning and generous donations from local Kuwaitis and businessmen. Later, a further KD16000 was pledged by a kind Kuwaiti benefactor who resides in the United States. This enabled the Children in Need in Iraq group of British ladies to set to work immediately, under the leadership of Dianne Wilton, to see how they may fund those projects that were being identified by the British Military in Iraq.

Captain Helena Lovell, based with the British Army, after liaising with the Minister for Social Affairs in Al-Amarah, identified two projects in July – the Al-Amarah Ophanage and the Al-Amarah School for the Deaf and Mute. These schools had been looted during the period following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and both facilities were undergoing rebuilding and refurbishment by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Iraq. They required furnishing and equipment before they could become operational again. Ladies from the group set to work immediately to purchase the equipment that would help bring smiles to faces of these children and their carers. The first consignment was collected in four 20ft container vehicles at the end of August and

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delivered to the delighted boys at the Al-Amarah Orphanage. Helena informed us that 18 Staff and 60 orphans were present for the arrival of the equipment from Kuwait and helped to unload it. The rebuilding of the School for the Deaf and Mute was soon completed also and volunteers from BLS and other friends purchased the goods and equipment requested. This second consignment was collected by representatives of the Kings own Borderers from Al-Amarah in mid October.

There was an additional request for shoes for the children of the Maysan Province which the BLS were delighted to agree to and \$5000 was provided for this purpose. However, the extent of this shoe project was only realised when Helena informed us that there were 220,000 children in the Province! Initially, a thousand pairs of shoes were distributed with the help of various NGOs in the area, together with baby baths and clothes. A further 500 pairs of shoes were distributed by the Iraqi Society supporting Childhood in Maysan and through the local Town Councils; the poorest families were identified and vouchers for shoes distributed. Helena Lovell attended this and said she felt that it was a fantastic occasion and the families were extremely grateful. Helena said that it is a significant achievement for all concerned and it is wonderful to see the fruit of the labours of the British Army and the BLS. 'Such projects give the people of Maysan Province that warm and fuzzy feeling that something is really happening and that people really understand their plight.'

Additional projects were completed during the latter part of 2003 including the provision of a much needed prefabricated mosque with a minaret for Az Zubayr in Southern Iraq, in time for the Holy month of Ramadan; equipment for a travelling Community Theatre and money to pay for much needed assistance with the reconstruction of a school and a medical centre in Hashiri, one of the more remote villages in Southern Iraq.

The work continued in 2004 with the collection, at the end of January, of yet another consignment by the British Army for the benefit of Children in Need in Southern Iraq, including 1500 more shoes for the children of the Maysan Province, mainly donated by pupils from various schools in Kuwait, together with a large quantity of text books; computers from the British Embassy, a box of stationery for school children donated by a Brownie Troop of girls, aged 5 – 8, from Maryland in the USA and playground equipment, furniture, toys and curtain fabric for a kindergarten in Az Zubayr. The British Ladies Society owes a particular debt of gratitude to the young son of a diplomat from Oman, Thomas Snell, who, by selling toys and holding bake sales raised enough money to buy most of the equipment for the Kindergarten.



Tragically, many children became innocent victims of the war in Iraq and for these life may never be the same again. One young man however, Ali Abbas, has become the symbol of hope for so many whose young lives have been irrevocably changed by the events in their country. He and his young companion, Ahmed Hamza, became the focus of another very significant project which was pursued by Mrs Wilton's Charity group from BLS. Ali had lost his family and both arms when a missile had fallen on his home during the bombing in Baghdad. The Kuwait government arranged to transfer Ali to the Ibn Sina Hospital where he underwent biological skin grafting surgery since 35% of his body was covered in burns. Ahmed, another victim of the war, was also being treated at the Ibn Sina Hospital, He had suffered the loss of one leg below the knee, one hand and a toe on the remaining foot. A strong friendship had developed between the boys and they gave each other encouragement during their period of recovery. By now, through the media worldwide, Ali and Ahmed had become the symbols of hope for the children who were victims of the ravages of war. Under the guidance of his physiotherapist, Nafisa Kamal, in the early stages of his treatment and recovery, Ali became adept at using his toes and discovered that he had a





talent for painting. Representatives of the British Ladies Society regularly visited the boys and upon seeing how successful Ali had been with his foot painting, proposed that the art work be made into greetings cards and notelets that could be sold to raise money for their future and to help to improve the lives of other child victims. Arrangements were made with Ali's guardian Dr Ahmed Al-Shatti to launch the project and so far, ten thousand pounds has been raised from the sale of the cards, through the generosity of so many from the local business community and others overseas. Dr Ahmed Al-Shatti, has looked after the boys' interests during the past few months, both here in Kuwait and whilst they were undergoing hospital treatment in the United Kingdom.

Recently, Ali and Ahmed, who were on a brief visit to Kuwait, attended a reception at the British Embassy held in their honour by Mrs Dianne Wilton, to meet physiotherapist Nafisa Kamal, and Dr Imad Al-Najjidah from the Ibn Sina Hospital and the ladies from BLS, who had worked so tirelessly towards the success of this project. It was a moving occasion when the boys arrived, tentatively using their new artificial limbs for which they were fitted in the UK at St. Mary's Hospital, Roehampton, accompanied by Ahmed's father and Ali's uncle, together with Dr Ahmed Al-Shatti. The pride and confidence in the faces of Ali and Ahmed bore testament to the work and dedication of Dianne Wilton and her team of British Ladies and the medical Staff who had helped them on their road to recovery and rehabilitation.

The British Ladies Society wishes to thank all those who have helped these initiatives for the Children in Need in Iraq through their generous donations or who have helped in so many other ways.

For further donations, please contact bls_q8@msn.com or janetreasurerbls@hotmail.com. Alternatively, donations can be received at the National Bank of Kuwait, Dasma Branch, Account name – British Ladies Society – Account number – 012 287571 01 01 or at any other NBK Branch (Online banking may be used).

For receiving donations in the UK: National bank of Kuwait (International) plc, 7 Portman Square, London W1H 9PR swift Code Nbok kwkw. The British Ladies Society is a registered charity and is also registered as an NGO with HOC in Kuwait.

RGBB Charity Cricket Match & Gala Dinner Evening 13th May

As a result of a challenge issued by the Construction SIG to the rest of the RGBB, we are holding a Charity Fund-raising Day in aid of the Children of Iraq. Starting with a game of cricket at 1.00pm on Thursday the 13th May and followed by a Gala Dinner at Venue One in the evening, the event promises to be another great day out.

The days events are open to all RGBB members interested in a lighthearted afternoon of limited over cricket.

In the first instance, those of you willing to participate in the game (players, scorers & umpires) should send a brief email to the team captains indicating your interest;

Brian Suggitt, captain of the Construction & Manufacturing team: bgsuggitt@zajil.net

Or

David Hunt, captain of the "Rest of the RGBB" Team david.hunt@sabb.com.sa

More details on the rest of the day will be advised at a later date. Watch your Inbox!

Time to stump up for the RGBB Charity Fundraiser Bring Cash!

Location: Venue One
Time: 7.30 til midnight
Dress: Flannels & Frocks

ADMIT ONE SR250