



New Fish Farming Project

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EDUCATION — February 2008

Progress at Kapanda Community Day Secondary School

Work has been going well at Kapanda, and the first double classroom block, the first teacher's house, and two double toilets are complete. As with all our projects, we are continually learning, and the next buildings should be quicker to erect. We have experienced supplies problems and varying qualities of bricks, but these problems have been addressed and we are now keeping larger stocks of materials in one of the classrooms. The building teams have been very committed and everyone has worked hard. The water ladies have had to carry water over 1km on their heads as we have been waiting for the borehole to be drilled. Our carpenters have made the desks, and the school is now ready to open.



The first double classroom block at Kapanda is completed



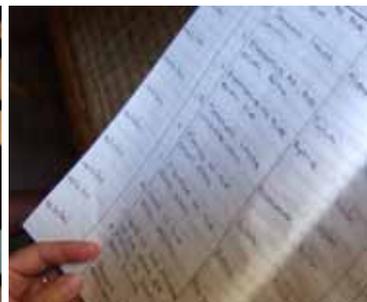
The first double classroom block under construction



The first three bedroomed teacher's house



Inside the first classroom



We keep accurate stores records to try and eliminate walking cement bags!



The water ladies have to carry all of the water over 1km to Kapanda



Mixing up cement for the floor slab



Daniel, one of the builders



We are making our own desks on site

We still need lots of help with funds as we want to continue with the building uninterrupted. As soon as the school is open, there will be tremendous pressure to open the other classrooms. We are so grateful to all our donors who have been involved with all sorts of activities to raise money for this project, and we hope you are pleased with the initial results.

Here is a list of what we still need to raise for 2008:

2 × double classroom blocks	£13,000 each	=	£26,000
1 × teacher's house	£11,700 each	=	£11,700
4 × double toilets	£ 2,000 each	=	£ 8,000

Cost of building materials continue to rise (**1 bag of cement now costs £8.50**)

We still need help to make 200 desks at a cost of £20 each, and any contribution towards books a full set of textbooks for a student is £80.



If you want to raise funds online for a marathon or any other event, you can easily set up your own fundraising page on www.justgiving.com/rippleafrica/raisemoney. See the link on our home page.

EDUCATION — February 2008

New Temporary Classroom at Kachere Primary School

You may remember that, in the last newsletter, we highlighted the chronically delapidated temporary double classroom at Kachere Primary school which was on the verge of collapsing. RIPPLE Africa provided the equivalent of £300 to Mr Gondwe, the headmaster, who organised the construction of a new temporary double classroom shown below. He was rightly very proud of the workmanship and the speed of erection.



There are blackboards on either side of the brick wall between the classrooms



The classrooms are light and airy and filled with happy children



Local materials provided a simple, cost effective solution

New Trainee Teachers

The government is always short of money, and there is a major problem in many schools due to shortages of teachers. RIPPLE Africa's successful programme of supplying and paying additional trainee teachers is proving to be a tremendous success locally. We now pay the salaries of 12 trainee teachers at local primary schools. Richard and Dollah at Mazembe Primary School and Flemings at Matete Primary School have just joined the programme. They have been very patient and have worked for nothing over the last two years.



Richard and Dollah, the new trainee teachers at Mazembe Primary School



Flemings outside his classroom at Matete Primary School



You can't believe how happy the teachers were to be included in the trainee teacher programme

Toys Now Made Locally for the Nursery Schools

Nicky, one of our dedicated volunteers who had been spending a lot of her time working in the nursery schools, decided that they needed more toys. She then designed a range of toys with Alex, a local wood carver, that could be made locally. A range of toys was made, and each of the five nurseries that RIPPLE Africa supports will be receiving these. The beauty of this project is that it is providing local employment, and the toys will be maintained and repaired locally too. They cost £100 to make and maintain, and we need money to pay for more sets.



Alex and Nicky with some of the prototypes



It just shows what can be done with a little imagination!



Children at Kachere nursery school



This playing is hard work!

EDUCATION — February 2008

Mazembe Nursery School Has Now Been Completed



The community moulded and fired the bricks



The motivated building team



Laying the floor slab



Justin laying the bricks

In the summer of 2007, the community at Mazembe moulded the bricks, then fired them in the kiln in September, and building work started in November. The team, lead by Andrew and Justin, worked on a contract basis. It was really exciting to see the daily progress and everything ran like clockwork. There was a really happy atmosphere, and it was always a pleasure to meet the team. This was a perfect project which was fully funded by Driven Worldwide, and we would love to make more of these sort of projects happen in the future. We left Malawi just before the nursery school opened, but it is now up and running, and the community at Mazembe will be forever grateful.



Ruben, Andrew, and Justin, the senior builders



The children who were always keen to see progress



This is the new Mazembe nursery school after just four weeks

Primary Schools Are Encouraged to Start Tree Nurseries

We are trying to encourage all members of the communities to become involved with our tree planting project. We now have a number of school tree nurseries. We went to visit Chihame Primary School in Chintheche, about 25 kms north of RIPPLE Africa's base at Mwaya Beach, and were pleased to see that Motrick Mwale, the headmaster, had encouraged the school's wildlife club to establish a very organised tree nursery with 1,710 tree seedlings. The pupils then sang and acted stories about deforestation and tree planting. It was wonderful to see the effect this initiative is having on the children.

Bush burning is a serious problem in rural areas and children are often the ones who start the fires. If they can appreciate how valuable the trees and grasses are, we will hopefully be able to reduce this destructive practice. It will be an uphill battle because the practice is so ingrained in the African culture, and they often say that they do it because they always have done.



Watering the lemon trees at Chihame Primary School



Matete Primary School



Motrick Mwale and members of the Wildlife Club at Chihame Primary School



Children are often responsible for starting bush fires

HEALTH — February 2008

NKHASO (Nkhata Bay AIDS Support Organisation) Maize and Vegetable Garden Project — Progress Is Being Made

Just before the rainy season began, work started on the NKHASO maize and vegetable garden project on a 5 acre plot of land near Chifira. Aram, a RIPPLE Africa volunteer, worked with Chester and Derrick of NKHASO and a group of Malawian volunteers. The aim of the garden was to provide food for orphans and HIV sufferers. Many of these individuals do not have the means to obtain essential nutrition, so this project is a lifeline to these people. As with most of RIPPLE Africa's projects, this project needs to be sustainable so half of the produce will be re-invested for seeds and equipment for next season and a portion will go to the volunteer workers on the project.

Aram has recently reported back saying that, as well as a large area of maize, there are now 26 raised vegetable beds with zucchini, cucumber, carrots, pumpkin, eggplant, mustard, lettuce, and tomatoes. More seeds will be planted when the rainy season has finished. Rice has also been planted, and 20 grafted fruit trees have been purchased and planted, including orange, tangerine, guava, and pawpaw. We also understand that the group will be receiving six goats made available by Aleke Banda, our local Member of Parliament.

Let's hope that this is just a start. If members of other communities are really concerned about the welfare of orphans and HIV sufferers, and they are prepared to put the work in, then maybe this could be a model for future nutrition projects. This project will benefit 309 local orphans and 121 positively tested HIV sufferers. The total material cost for this project was under £200.



Some of the equipment purchased at the start of the project



Preparing the ground for planting



Aram getting really stuck in— he was really proud to be working with this wonderful team



Watering the seeds

We originally made money available to Keltone, who was the main director in charge of NKHASO. Unfortunately, he disappeared with the money and has not been seen again! Chester and Derrick, the other directors, came to see us and were still passionate about this garden project. We trusted that they would use the money wisely this time, and this garden is a credit to them and Aram. Chester and Derrick run NKHASO purely on a voluntary basis, and it would be wonderful if RIPPLE Africa could support more of their good work in the future.



Aram and the team at the vegetable garden project at Fuwa Chifira



Happily watering the seeds

HEALTH — February 2008

Placenta Pit



In the last newsletter, we reported on the state of the old placenta pit at Kachere Health Centre which was full and collapsing. This was regularly commented on by readers of the newsletter, but nobody actually funded it. However, we decided that it was a necessary project and funded it anyway. The picture on the left shows the pit under construction.

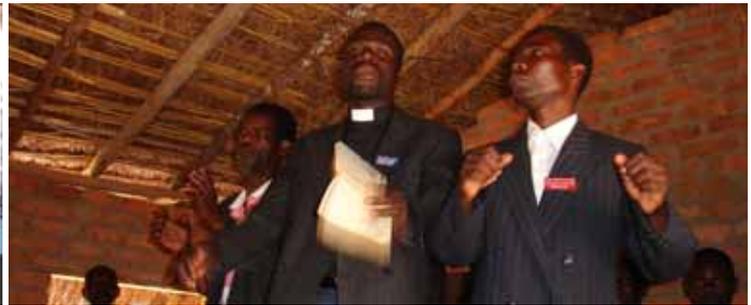
Bicycle Ambulances

We have received funding for six bicycle ambulances and have constructed the first prototype. It is a new design by Jessica Vechakul, who is currently a Mechanical Engineering graduate student at MIT. We have selected a local metalworking company to manufacture these ambulances using her plans but, unfortunately, they are working out more expensive than we had originally calculated, mainly due to the cost of the raw materials. We had estimated the unit cost at £150, but it will be closer to £230. We do not have any pictures yet of this prototype, but we will be chasing this up on our next visit.

HIV/AIDS Awareness and Health Education — The Initial Results



The church congregations are eager to learn about health issues and ask many questions



Local churches have been very keen to get involved with this awareness campaign

Public health education is a vital step to communities understanding health issues. We started our HIV awareness campaign on our previous visit. RIPPLE Africa pays for two Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) to visit local churches and give a 15 minute talk followed by a 15 minute question and answer session. This has been a very successful programme and, for a small investment, there has been an increase of 378 people who have been tested for HIV between July and October. The total figure tested for that period was 578. To show what an achievement that is, the town of Nkhata Bay, which has a much bigger population, tested 328 people in the same period. We need more funds to develop this programme.

New Community Clinic — Work Will Start in 2008

In our last newsletter, we reported that we wanted to construct a new Community Clinic. This will now become a reality after we received a kind donation to fund this project. The local community at Matete will manufacture the bricks in July 2008 so that construction can start between October and December. We have been in talks with the District Health Officer about how the clinic can work and the general design of the building, so now we are looking forward to starting this project.

New Healthcare Coordinator

We are pleased to announce that RIPPLE Africa has employed Fletcher Soko (pictured on the right) as our Healthcare Coordinator to assist and work with all our healthcare volunteers. Fletcher will also continue with his job as a Health Surveillance Assistant.



Senior Chiefs Visit the Deforested Area of Chikwawa



The Senior Chiefs learning about deforestation and how it is affecting the communities at Chikwawa



One of the heavily deforested and eroded hills at Chikwawa



If individuals do not grow their own trees, they will have no wood in the future for cooking, etc.

Deforestation is a major problem in Malawi but, fortunately, Nkhata Bay District (the area in which we are operating) still has lots of forest areas. In the south of the country, however, nearly all areas have been deforested, and in most places there are no large trees as far as the eye can see. We were told about an area called Chikwawa, which is particularly badly deforested, where there is devastating soil erosion. Aleke Banda, our MP, suggested that we should take all of the senior chiefs in Nkhata Bay District to visit Chikwawa. Force, our environmental projects manager, organised this trip, and the chiefs were horrified to see what is happening in their own country. This trip made a real impression on the chiefs, and they have been galvanised into action to try and prevent the same thing happening in their area. RIPPLE Africa has funded awareness meetings with the senior chiefs and some of their 400 village headmen. We see this as the start of our environmental awareness programme.

Tree Planting Programme 2007-2008



RIPPLE Africa staff promoting the "Care for the Trees of Malawi" campaign



One of the 137 RIPPLE Africa tree nurseries



David Banda, a forest guard, with one of the community tree nursery members



Recently planted trees at Kachere Primary School — growing quickly!

Our tree planting programme has developed very quickly over the past two years and, with the small resources that we have had, the RIPPLE Africa staff and the communities have achieved amazing results. We have had a very successful tree planting programme during the last 12 months, and 1,250,000 tree seedlings have been raised in 137 tree nurseries — we estimate that we now have about 3,000 people working on this project. Last year, many of the trees were planted in a variety of areas, and it was difficult to monitor and manage these trees. This year, through the guidance of our new supervisors, we have encouraged communities to plant the majority of trees in a few selected areas. This will mean that monitoring and caring for the trees will be easier. It is important to make sure that communities look after these trees for at least the first two years by clearing the grass from around each tree, preventing bush burning, and preventing goats from roaming freely in these areas. Also, by protecting these areas, trees that have previously been cut down will be given the chance to grow again. This secondary growth will provide diversity and, because the trees will have established roots, they will grow more quickly and more successfully than the newly planted trees.

We will be changing the emphasis of the project during 2008 to provide much more awareness training and monitoring. We have certainly experienced failures where trees have been planted and then, in the dry season, bush fires have killed a number of them. Our goal for this year is to maintain the existing 137 nurseries and only to establish an additional 23 nurseries.

We now have four supervisors, two assistant supervisors, and two awareness training officers employed

on the tree planting programme. All of these staff live locally and are working hard to achieve the goals set by RIPPLE Africa.

Alupro Fruit Tree Growing Project — An Exciting Start!



The new Alupro greenhouse under construction — this will be used for grafting and budding



Preparing a local mango for grafting onto an improved mango



Hardy lemons and guavas — we estimate that over 200,000 fruit trees have been grown this season



Introducing oranges to the Senior Chiefs — they had never seen oranges like these before!

In June 2007, Alupro sponsored our fruit tree project. Our aim was to establish a fruit tree nursery at Mwaya with a greenhouse for grafting and budding, and to grow fruit trees in some of the community tree nurseries. The communities and the RIPPLE Africa staff have been so excited and enthusiastic about this programme that we have extended the fruit tree project to all of our nurseries. They have been growing lemon trees as hardy root stock for oranges and tangerines, mangos for grafting, guavas and pawpaws, and some avocados. These improved fruit trees will provide valuable income generation from the sale of the tree seedlings and eventually the sale of fruit. Also, local communities will benefit from eating the fruit.

We held a very exciting meeting with the senior chiefs and gave them navel oranges, purchased from a supermarket in Lilongwe and imported from South Africa. They had never seen oranges like these before, and our aim is for communities to be able to grow large, juicy oranges in the future. We have already organised the purchase of budwood from improved orange and tangerine trees to be budded on to the hardy lemon stock.

In November 2007, Cherry Hamson, the Communications Director for Alupro, visited Mwaya to see how the project was developing. Cherry is very passionate about this project being an enormous success. She is promoting the project with local authorities and schools in the UK, and many of them have featured the project in their magazines and websites.

The Mbaula Projects Are Really Taking Off!



One of the mbaula training days — everyone has a go, even Amos our driver!



These were fired one day and all sold the next!



Linda, the mbaula project manager, and her assistant Lianna

When we visited Malawi in May 2007, we were rather disappointed with the progress being made with our mbaula project. After talking with Linda, the manager in charge of the project, we were delighted to see a massive improvement in the programme in October. Linda had really taken on board the ethos of RIPPLE Africa and had developed an improved and simpler method of construction to provide more uniform mbaulas. She had also established an impressive training programme for the groups of mbaula makers, and we now have an ideal model which we are replicating in different areas. Each group is given, on a loan basis, equipment and materials, and we build their kiln and shelters for them. This all

costs about £200, and we expect the groups to pay back this money over a two year period so that it can then be re-invested in future projects.

We visited several community training programmes and were pleased to see that all RIPPLE Africa staff have been trained to make mbaula — even Amos, the driver, had been trained so that his time could be used productively rather than just sitting around waiting. One group of ladies had just fired their first batch of 50 mbaula when we visited them, and we heard later that all of the mbaula had been sold the following day after they had held a demonstration in their village. Our goal is for communities to produce 20,000 of these units per year. We estimate that this will save 1.6 million trees per year and generate a valuable income for 200-300 families.

Introducing Micro-Loans

As RIPPLE Africa develops, we find that everything we do is inter-related. For example, if you are encouraging people to plant trees, this will have an impact on agriculture. Education is important for people to understand environmental issues and health issues, etc. The future for countries like Malawi cannot be just reliance on aid. Aid in the past just has not worked, and people in Malawi are poorer now than they have ever been. Our philosophy of providing a hand up rather than a hand out means that we are trying to enable Malawians to help themselves. In order to do this, there are two components that are vital. The first is money and the second is food. To generate food and money, you really need business and trade but the rural Malawians have no money to get started and, invariably, the sort of businesses that they can start up are to do with farming of one type or another.

We have recently read a very inspiring book by Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel prize winner who started the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh (the book is called "Banker to the Poor"). With the ideas from this book, RIPPLE Africa is now venturing into new areas (for example, fish farming and bee-keeping), and we believe that by providing micro-loans for groups of people enables them to establish viable businesses. If RIPPLE Africa is to loan this money, we need to be assured that the loan and interest will be paid back to re-invest in future projects. So what we have decided to do is to establish some pilot projects to learn and understand these businesses so that we can give valuable guidance to people who take out loans in the future.

Fish Farming



A farmed chambo fish



Fish farming needs to be integrated with chickens and goats for best results



Newly dug 20m x 20m fish ponds at Chiomba — there are 10 ponds



Pond digging at Ngoli — so far six ponds have been dug here in total

Due to over-fishing and increased population, fishermen are finding it increasingly difficult to catch fish in Lake Malawi. In the mid 1970s, the average Malawian consumed 14kg of fish a year — today, that figure is less than 4kg — a drastic reduction. We had heard about inland fish farms and, on our last trip, we had a meeting with the head of the Fisheries Department in Nkhata Bay, Stan Banda, and two local fisheries extension workers to find out about this. It would appear that there are charities who are paying for inland fish ponds to be dug and are then providing small fish (fingerings), but that's where the projects seem to end and very few of these are successful. We asked Stan how we could develop a fish farming programme that was successful and, in short, there needs to be ownership of the ponds and a fully integrated approach with proper feeding to provide an environment to grow larger fish which could command higher prices. This money can then be re-invested to develop the programmes.

We decided to establish three projects: Project 1 involves four women and four ponds, and Project 2 involves four men and four ponds. These two groups will work in competition with each other to make

the most money. The third project, Project 3, comprises a group of 10 fish ponds, and these are owned by a group of individuals but are managed and run on a commercial basis. All three projects are being established on a micro-loan basis, and Alex, the local fisheries extension worker, is working closely with each group to ensure success of the projects. Already, 16 ponds, measuring 20m x 20m x 1m to 1.5m deep, have been dug, and fingerlings (small fish) are being introduced. The integrated approach means that we will also be keeping goats, chickens and ducks which, apart from the obvious benefits of meat, eggs, etc., will provide droppings to feed the plankton which will in turn give protein to the fish. There will also be a regime of good quality balanced feeding to promote good fish growth to enable the groups to maximise income.

We will obviously have setbacks, but our aim is to have three very successful fish pond projects which can be used as an example for future RIPPLE Africa and other fish pond projects. We will be reporting on progress of this project after our next visit in May/June 2008.

Bee-Keeping — “No trees, no bees. No honey, no money!”



Bee keeping can protect the forests.
“No trees, no bees. No honey, no money!”



A typical top bar beehive — communities will own and manage these hives to generate income and honey

For a long time, we have thought that bee-keeping would be a fun project to get involved with, but this last trip has been very enlightening. In our approach to protect forest areas, we needed to establish a viable reason to keep them so that communities could see the value of keeping forests rather than cutting them down. In all truth, forests don't immediately offer communities much benefit and, when they see an area of trees, rather than saying how beautiful they look, they tend to feel it would be better to cut them down and grow cassava. Bee-keeping, however, can hopefully change this.

We had a very interesting meeting with Pam Gregory, a bee-keeper from the UK, who has set up a honey-producing project near Nkhata Bay, and she gave us lots of information about bee-keeping in Malawi. Our vision is to establish groups of bee-keepers who will look after beehives in nominated forestry areas. These bee-keepers will be enabled with a loan from RIPPLE Africa, which will be paid back over two years, to purchase individually up to 10 beehives. They will then realise the value of maintaining the forests and will naturally protect the forests from bush fires and deforestation. The first project is to be started on a beautiful forested hill at Kafuli. There will be 50 beehives in this forest and 10 members. RIPPLE Africa will gain valuable knowledge on the viability of this sort of business so that we can hopefully establish many more bee-keeping businesses in the future.

Vegetable Growing Business

We have established a number of vegetable businesses with varying degrees of success. Vegetables are much needed in rural Malawi to improve nutrition. There are several factors which will produce a good vegetable business; you need the right location, and a committed individual who has vision, ability, and a good work ethic, and, last but not least, a desire to make money. Some of the first projects have been community ones, without real ownership of the project by an individual to drive it. These projects have, in certain cases, not even recovered the initial outlay.

One project that has been very successful is Kaipah's vegetable garden. We went to visit his amazing garden after he had made the effort to visit us with some of his produce which were some of the best locally produced vegetables that we had seen. After the tour of his garden, his wife, Elimasi, produced a wonderful mixed vegetable dish with rice for us to eat. It was so tasty!



Kaipah visited Mwaya with this wonderful vegetable selection



A visit to Kaipah's garden



A delicious home cooked mixed vegetable meal — really tasty!



Healthy vegetables and a desire to succeed

Several weeks later, Kaipah came to see us with a proposal. We sat down together and went through the figures and came up with a micro-loan plan so that he could employ staff and set up a larger commercial vegetable growing business. He ended up borrowing MK75,000 (about £270 or US\$540). This will be paid back with 20% interest within one year. We are convinced that he will make a success of this. The first good indication was that, when we gave him the cash, he immediately gave it to his wife for safe-keeping. We will be visiting him on our next trip to see how progress is going but initial reports are good.

This project will be an interesting case study for future vegetable garden projects. Watch this space!

Fruit Drying



Three of the women from the fruit drying group drying mangoes on racks in the sun



Michael was keen to get involved with this project



Dried mangoes packaged for sale

This year, we organised a group of women to start drying mangoes in good time before the rains really started in earnest. Michael, a RIPPLE Africa volunteer, was keen to get involved with this project. We carried out market testing and were surprised to find that very few local people had ever tasted dried mango before. RIPPLE Africa purchased a large number of small plastic bags so that the dried mangoes can be packed and marketed by the women when the mango season has finished to see if people are interested in purchasing them at other times of the year. If this is successful, it will give the group confidence to expand the project next year.

Major Deforestation Is Still Going on in the Hills Behind Kande



These hills are being deforested to grow 2-3 crops of mountain rice — the wood is just burnt where it falls



Beautiful, large hardwood trees are ringed to kill the tree so that cassava can be grown



These steep deforested slopes are heavily eroded after the first rains

OTHER NEWS — February 2008

A New Vehicle for RIPPLE Africa

Vehicles and transport are one of our most expensive costs, but unfortunately they are vital. We have bought Force a new four wheel drive pickup for the reforestation project. He has called it "Patience" because he had to wait so long for it! We still have Benjy, the old toyota pickup, which is now resident at Mwaya Beach.



Force with his new pickup called Patience

Geoff and Liz, and Friends David and Gay, Have Purchased Lowani Beach



Lowani Beach is half a kilometer long and is located between Mwaya Beach and Kande



The existing store which we have temporarily renovated



Robinson, who has been the manager at Lowani Beach for a number of years. He is an amazing character.



To sit under this Kachere tree and absorb the beauty of the surroundings is just such a wonderful thing to do

Together with some friends of ours, David and Gay, we have just purchased Lowani Beach from Kevin Murray and want to develop another volunteer project. We often get asked if large groups can come to Mwaya Beach, but we are now fully booked with longer term volunteers. At Lowani Beach, we intend to have larger groups for short periods to become involved with specific projects and to learn about life in rural Malawi. This will not only be a great opportunity for these visitors but will provide vital income for RIPPLE Africa to maintain our projects and develop new ones. We are starting basic development to provide toilets and showers and then a dining/lounge area, and the first volunteers will sleep in tents. Eventually, we hope to build some chalets.

Donors Are Now Visiting Mwaya



Adrian, who walked Hadrian's Wall to raise money for RIPPLE Africa with a colleague, Paul, was visiting Malawi on business and decided to travel over 500 km to visit Mwaya and stay for a couple of days. He wanted to see what RIPPLE Africa was doing on the ground. He was very impressed and is now planning his next fundraising event to raise more money for RIPPLE Africa. We encourage any donors to come and see how their money is being spent and to give them inspiration to continue to help in the future.

It's Not All Hard Work!



We always have great fun meeting all our volunteers, and our last trip was no exception. Everyone had a tremendous time, and we will all have some wonderful memories. As always, we enjoyed our trip to Ngala to drink the beers, eat the pizzas and enjoy some pretty crazy dancing. The fancy dress evening on Halloween was a great success, and everyone made a great effort with basic materials and lots of imagination!