

## HIGHLAND EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION

The following article is reproduced from THOI DAI ( Vietnam Times) published in December 2011

**T**hrough its relationships with over 100 non-governmental organisations abroad, to create funding HEDO has carried out projects to build schools, health clinics, cultural centres, bought medical equipment and run courses for traditional midwives, and drug abuse and HIV/AIDS awareness for the difficult ethnic minority areas.

With funding support from Medical and Scientific Aid to Vietnam Laos and Cambodia, HEDO has carried out the training of traditional midwives to become modern method midwives.

Professor Trinh Ngoc Trinh, Director of HEDO said “According to the beliefs of ethnic minority people, if a child is not born at home it faces a future of helplessness with no one to care for it and no family love”. Additionally travel to local commune clinics is difficult due to distance and the state of the road infrastructure. Because of these circumstances most women give birth at home with the help of

traditional midwives whose knowledge has been passed down over the generations.

The lack of medical equipment and techniques leads to high mortality rates in both mothers and

commune health centre, district hospital or provincial hospital.

At the end of the 10-day course the newly trained midwives are supplied with medical cases containing the equipment they require to ensure safe delivery at home.

Every month the midwives meet with the commune health workers to report on their activities and discuss improvements in their techniques ensuring that the knowledge they have gained is put to the best possible use.

Between 1999 and 2011 courses have been provided in Lang Son, Lai Chau, Tuyen Quang, Dien Bien, Son La, and Hoa Binh provinces in the mountainous northern highlands of Vietnam.

More than 1200 midwives and medical staff at village level have been trained by the project.

Statistics show that in the areas where newly trained midwives work the infant and maternal mortality rate has decreased significantly and more and more women are being persuaded to go to their local commune health centre for delivery.



*Prof. Trinh & Peter Lidgard with Midwives in Lang Son*

babies. For this reason HEDO decided to provide training in modern methods for the midwives.

The wide ranging course prepares the volunteer midwives for all aspects of health care for both mothers and babies. Most importantly they are trained to recognise the cases where there is the need to transfer the mother to a

# MY LAI

**M**Y LAI is situated in Quang Ngai Province in central Vietnam. Here at 7.30 a.m. on the 16th March, 1968, U.S. troops swept through four hamlets in the Son My sub-district, systematically killing 504 villagers, most of them the elderly, women and children. The largest mass killing took place in Xam Lang (Than Yen), which is where we visited on the 30th March, 2011.

The area was beautiful, peaceful, with rice paddies and small houses all around. The Americans claimed that it was a stronghold for the Viet Cong. However, they encountered no resistance as they advanced on the hamlets, after bombarding them with artillery, rocket and machine gun fire from helicopter gun-ships. Charlie Company landed by helicopter, advanced through the fields and the atrocities began.

Villagers were shot and bayoneted, hand grenades were thrown into houses and bomb shelters, crops were destroyed, live-stock slaughtered and houses burnt to the ground. About 150 unarmed villagers were rounded up, herded to a ditch and mowed down by machine gun fire. One man was thrown alive into a

well, and then shot.

Over the next few hours unspeakable crimes were committed, as command helicopters circled patrolled offshore. Groups of civilians, including women and children were assembled and executed, and fleeing villagers were machine-



gunned down. As the massacre was taking place girls and women were raped or gang-raped by groups of soldiers. At the end of the murderous rampage 504 people had died, including 182 women, 17 of them pregnant, 173 children and 37 men over 60.

One soldier shot himself in the

foot to extricate himself from the slaughter. He was the only American casualty in the entire operation. The soldiers tried to cover up the atrocities by covering the bodies with straw and burning them. Later the U.S. military ploughed the ground to destroy the evidence of their crimes, but although the troops who participated were ordered to keep their mouths shut, several disobeyed and told their stories on returning to the U.S.A. All levels of U.S. army command tried to cover up the massacre, but eventually Lieutenant Calley was made a scapegoat and sentenced to life imprisonment, but he only served three years under house arrest! But, of course, he didn't act alone!

However, one U.S. officer, Captain Hugh Thompson saw what was happening and put his helicopter down between the fleeing villagers and the G.I's and he rescued about ten of them, turning his guns on his U.S. Commander whilst doing so! However, he was vilified on his return home, and eventually died an alcoholic.

Bizarrely, the event was painstakingly documented by a U.S. military photographer, and

# MY LAI continued

some of these photos are on display in a small museum at the site. The museum also has used armaments on show, and some sad little mementoes that belonged to the villagers, cooking utensils, children's toys, and a shoe that had belonged to a four year old. Some photos of the villagers and the U.S. soldiers are on display and a lifesize model of some of the atrocities.

It also shows hope, with photos of the reconstruction of the hamlets after the war and the local people rebuilding their lives. There was a huge plaque with the names of the 504 victims and their ages engraved on it, as a memorial to them.

We wandered outside and here the scene had been recreated to reflect the aftermath of that fateful, dreadful day. Shacks and burnt out shells of homes stand in their original locations, each marked with a plaque listing the names and ages of the families that had resided there. There was one house that was completely reconstructed in its original form, and it was so poignant going into it and

imagining the fear that the occupants must have felt as the soldiers advanced. It was an incredibly moving experience! Sculptures of dead animals were scattered amongst the houses, and there was a bomb shelter with the names on a plaque of the villagers that were slaughtered inside. Mass graves were marked with monuments to the villagers that were buried there; the number and ages of the children was heartbreaking to see.

There was one tall palm tree that had escaped the burning and stood high above the village blowing gently in the breeze, its memories too painful to imagine. Somehow you avoided touching it for fear that you too could feel its pain.

The most shocking feature for me, however, was that the paths connecting the houses had been indented with the heavy bootprints of American soldiers, and bare footprints, to represent the fleeing villagers. You could feel these prints under your feet as you walked along. It made it all seem so very real!

The gardens were all beautifully

kept and there were lots of bonsai trees in pots, donated by foreign organisations. The area, at last, was peaceful, but we walked slowly around feeling sadness and despair for the evil of war and its continuance today.

There were several stone statues of grieving women and children, and one huge dramatic sculpture of an elderly woman holding up her fist in defiance, a dead child in her arms, as the rest of her family lay dying at her feet. Many visitors bring incense to burn here. One U.S. veteran visited with 504 red roses which he placed at the foot of the sculpture to represent all the flowers that the victims would have received in their lives, the young ones from their lovers, and the old ones from their grandchildren. We cried.

There was also a large monument with a mosaic depicting the massacre, with red tear-like blood, dripping to the ground.

We stayed for a couple of hours, said some prayers and signed the remembrance book. We left in silence.

*Mary Lidgard  
Assistant Secretary*

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## FUNDRAISING

**The continuing work of the charity is solely dependant on the donations and fundraising efforts of you, our supporters.**

We can see in this bulletin that fundraising can take many forms and many of them can actually be fun. From "Naming the Dog" and "Safari Suppers" to Church congregation's "Charity of the Month" and bequests, every penny

is vital and well used.

The Annual Accounts for 2011 showed that the Trustees of the charity, are ensuring that the results of your efforts are channelled into supporting projects in South East Asia rather than being wasted on unnecessary administration costs.

If you see an opportunity to raise both funds and awareness of the work of the charity we would be pleased to hear from you. We can

help in many ways by providing speakers and display materials. Our work continues to be vital to the poor of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, so please do all you can to help.

For further information please contact Peter Lidgard at the charity address on the back of this bulletin or by e-mail at: [thelidgards@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:thelidgards@hotmail.co.uk)

# GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER



who knocked on their door. After the first course the safari continued as the diners set off in different directions in Fairford to enjoy their second course with other guests, at other local dining tables. Puddings were then served with different people again, at yet

**A** number of Fairford residents certainly didn't know who to expect when they answered their doors on Saturday 30th June. That was because they had agreed to take part in a Secret Safari Supper, to raise funds for Medical and Scientific Aid for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

The organisers of the Safari Supper, Christine Benzie and Jane Phillips had asked their friends to prepare a course for six people and then to wait and see

other locations, and all 32 diners ended their safari together at the home of Christine and Stewart Benzie. There they were served coffee and liqueurs and were given a brief outline of the charity's work by Mary and Peter Lidgard. A raffle was also held with many of the prizes



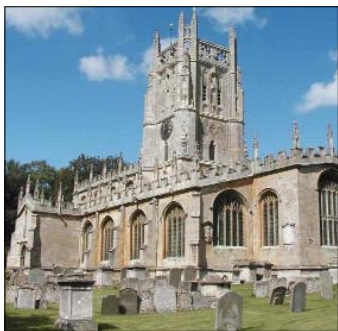
being Vietnamese handicrafts.

A wonderful evening was had by all and the magnificent sum of £610 was raised. Many thanks to everyone who cooked a course and who supported the charity so generously, and for the donations from others who could not attend. Special thanks to Drs Christine and Stewart Benzie, and to Jane and Greg Phillips for all their hard work, enthusiasm and logistical skills in organizing the event!

*Mary Lidgard  
(Assistant Secretary)*

## FUND-RAISING AT ST. MARY'S CHURCH, FAIRFORD

**I**n March Medical and Scientific Aid for Vietnam Laos and Cambodia was chosen as charity of the month by St. Mary's Church in Fairford, Gloucestershire.



gave a short talk to the congregation about the charity's work. We also mounted a small exhibition of photographs taken at several of the projects which we support. It was a

Peter and I, both Trustees of the charity, and ex-residents of Fairford,

delight to be back in the beautiful 15th century church and great interest in the charity was shown.

We were delighted to learn that a total of £500.42 was raised by the congregation and our thanks go to all those who so generously donated. Our thanks also go to the Revd. Brian Atkinson and Dr. Christine Benzie for their help.

As well as raising money it gave us the opportunity to make people aware of the work that the charity does. We expect to go to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia next year to assess the projects and make sure that the money which was donated is put to good use. Thank you again.

*Mary Lidgard  
(Assistant Secretary)*

## BEQUEST

**W**e were saddened to hear of the death of long time supported Alfred Edward Walker, from Ashover near Chesterfield.

It is heart warming to note that the charity and the people of South East Asia were in his thoughts when deciding where his estate should be distributed. We have received a bequest of £5,000 from the estate for use in supporting projects in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

We hope that other supporters will follow the example of Alfred and make a provision in their will for the work of MSAVLC.

# COVENTRY SCHOOLBOYS RAISE MONEY FOR VIETNAMESE CHILDREN



*Sam Lowe & Nathaniel Booth pictured at Bablake School*

**W**hen a Year 7 class at Bablake School in Coventry were asked to nominate a charity for their fundraising day Nathaniel Booth and Sam Lowe persuaded classmates to raise money for MSAVLC.

The boys held a "name the dog" competition charging 20 pence per go to win a box of Celebrations chocolates.

40 of their colleagues took part

raising £8.00 which will go to the Thanh Xuan Peace Village in Hanoi. The Peace Village looks after child victims of Agent Orange and the money will go towards improving the quality of life for these innocent victims of a war which ended long before they were born.

Our thanks are extended to Nathaniel and Sam for thinking about the plight of children so far away and raising the awareness of their school friends.

## THANK YOU

**A** big thank you to everyone who responded to our appeal for e-mail addresses. Printing and postage continue to be the largest of our administrative costs and every stamp saved means more money is available to support projects in South East Asia.

## TRUSTEES' MEETING JUNE 2012

**A**t their June meeting trustees were able to approve the Annual Report of the charity for the year ending 31 December 2011 in advance of the Annual General Meeting in July.

Members also received reports from HEDO on the latest Training Course for Traditional Midwives and from Helping Hands Cambodia

Approval was given for the funding of a further midwives course in Ba Be District, Bac Kan Province and for the continuation of the Paraplegic and Quadriplegic project for DDSP.

A number of fundraising projects were discussed ranging from marathon running to a repeat of the "Safari Supper" organised a few years ago by supporters in Fairford.

A redesign of our website is being undertaken by our very good friend Nick Wright in liaison with trustee Brian Stenson. Nick intends that we will be able to update the new website more readily, ensuring that it always shows current information.

Nick does this work free of charge, in his spare time, and we are immensely grateful for his efforts.

*Peter Lacy  
Chairman*

## FRIENDS RE-UNITED!



**J**oint President, Dr. Madeleine Sharp and former Executive Committee member, Shirley Hepple met for lunch prior to the Charity's AGM, in July 2012.

The occasion was also used to present Shirley with a small gift to thank her for her years of work and support for the charity.

# RECEPTION AT WESTMINSTER RAISES MONEY FOR VICTIMS OF AGENT ORANGE

**A** reception was held in June, at Portcullis House, Westminster, to raise money for victims of Agent Orange and to support a new cancer hospital in Da Nang, Vietnam.

The reception, hosted by George Howarth MP, chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Vietnam, was attended by several members of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, together with representatives of businesses having interests in Vietnam.

George Howarth spoke of the on going requirement for aid to support

victims of Agent Orange and made mention of his recent visit to the Thanh Xuan Peace Village in Hanoi.

Ambassador Vu Quang Minh, in thanking, Mr Howarth for organising the reception, praised the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group for strengthening the relationship between Great Britain and Vietnam.

Also speaking at the event were Foreign Office Minister Jeremy Browne MP and his Opposition Shadow Kerry McCarthy MP.

Following the speeches, an auction was held with Guardian journalist Michael White persuading everyone

to dig deep into their pockets for prizes donated by the great and the good from Westminster. Heading the list of donors were Speaker Bercow, Prime Minister David Cameron, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and Leader of the Opposition Ed Miliband.

The auction together with a raffle raised over £5,000, the money will be split between support for victims of Agent Orange and the new Cancer Hospital.

*Peter Lacy  
Chairman*

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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



**T**he AGM was held on July 10th at the Vietnamese Embassy in London. At the start of the meeting members and supporters were addressed by H.E Vu Quang Minh who thanked the charity for it's continuing work for the people of S.E. Asia.

The officers and trustees of the charity were all re-elected for the coming year and the accounts for 2011 were approved. Members confirmed the appointment of Mrs Nicola Hewlett MAAT as Auditor.

Following the formal business of the meeting there was the opportunity

to chat with old friends and sample Vietnamese food at a buffet provided by the Embassy. As always we are grateful and overwhelmed by the hospitality of the Ambassador and his staff.

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