

The 'white building' at Kwasa

How a dream became reality

'Kwasa' is a Zulu word used to describe the moment of light and peace that is often seen after a storm. That journey from storm and tribulation to light-filled peace is wonderfully illustrated by the story of the imposing structure standing at the entrance to the Kwasa College, known to many simply as 'the white building'.



Now home to a beautiful school hall – complete with a lighting and sound system – an IT room, toilets, offices and reception, as well as a clinic for the local community, it was once very different.



Visitors from Holy Trinity and St Mary's over the years remember 'a broken-down building with junkies and alcoholics drinking home-made liquor, past which all children and staff had to walk



day by day to reach the sanctuary of school ... we were very firmly told not to go near the white

building – lots of drug dealing going on ... There was a sense of foreboding as we passed a



dilapidated building with huge iron bars across the front. When we left the school there was the intimidating sight of a crowd of local men lounging around on old settees and chairs ... We generally avoided the white building. It always seemed ominous and a bit gloomy.'

But Sharron Dinnie, Rector of the College, had long had a dream that Kwasa would be a place of wholeness, creativity and hope, and in 2013 the first steps on the journey were taken when a Johannesburg firm of architects (working pro bono, for they too subscribed to Sharron's vision) drew up plans to convert the white building into a hall and offices.



Discussions between Sharron and the West Green Charitable Trust followed in 2014. The most serious obstacle at that time was posed by the 220 or more squatters living in the



white building, using the water supply without paying, dealing in drugs and brewing alcohol – a frightening and forbidding presence at the entrance to the College. With the help of the local council, however, in an act 'typical of the kindness and love of that wonderful woman', Sharron succeeded in relocating them to a site elsewhere on Kwasa land.

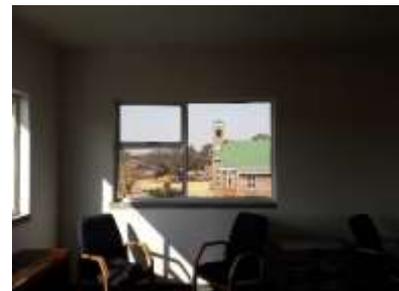
Thus by 2016 the building had been stripped out and cleared ready for work and during 2017 walls, doorways and window openings were prepared to enable roofing and glazing to take place. As part of the network of local connections being put in place, students from an independent school near Johannesburg provided welcome help to Gordon the builder, cleaning and laying bricks and mixing 'daga', or mud-brick.



By October 2018 the roof was on and windows installed but as yet there were no doors, power or flooring.



It was always intended that the building should include office space for staff, and some of the group that visited in 2018 helped move furniture into Sharron's lovely new office, even though it was still reached only by an extremely rickety metal staircase, apparently attached to the wall by a single bolt!



Windows, electrics and the sprung stage in the hall were completed in 2019, and during 2020 the new floor and doors were put in and the sound and lighting system installed.



The entrance foyer was finished and the courtyard paved, and Sharron and Owen (Head of Primary) now have a safe new steel staircase by which to reach their offices.



The clinic is now up and running, with separate entrance, waiting area, consulting room and washroom. The very latest news is that in February 2021 the IT/Media room, with 24 new computers and work spaces, was opened.

Sharron's dream – of Kwasa as a place where people feel welcomed, valued and involved, where College and community flourish together – backed both by generous donations from overseas and practical support from locals, has been and is being fulfilled right now.

For the future, there are plans to encourage local churches and communities to use the hall as well as to rent it out for weddings and celebrations. It has already been booked by the Education Department for use as an exam hall. At present a retired Senior District Nurse

works part time in the clinic, but Sharron hopes to persuade one of the town's GP practices to provide a doctor to work there part time as well and to open the clinic to the wider community. The journey is not over yet!



Kwasa – light and peace after the storm

For more on the links between Kwasa College and Holy Trinity & St Mary's, see
<https://www.htsmguildford.org/kwasa>