

Report for the May 2015 meeting of the Malvern Civic Society

On Friday 10 May Jane Smith gave a very inspiring talk entitled “How Malvern’s wild orchids help Gambian bananas grow”.

In recounting the story of her charity “Just Act Gambia”, Jane Smith, a native of Malvern, emphasised how many of the most important developments happened by chance. It was chance which took her to the small West African country of Gambia in the first place. It was chance she ended up in the village of Janjanbureh. It was chance which led her to set up a training scheme for the young people of the village. Step by step this has expanded into a rural regeneration charity called **JUST ACT** (**J**anjanbureh **U**niting **S**ustainable **T**ourism **A**nd **C**ommunity **T**raining), which has pushed forward a variety of community-led projects to provide life skills and employment opportunities, such as tourist guide, forestry and waste- management training, a banana plantation, bee-keeping and even a Football Academy for girls as well as boys.

Supporting this Gambian charity has now become the focus of Jane’s life. Here again chance played its part. She bought a small camera, although previously she had no photographic interest. She started to take wild-life photos on the beautiful Peachfield Common which lies in front of her house. This led to her discovery of the wild orchids which grow there in such profusion. She began to sell books and calendars and cards of her photographs and, for a time, the only financial support for her Gambian charity came from the money she raised from these sales.

Jane is now trying to hand over the running of the charity to a few trusted friends and supporters, but she is still raising funds for it in a multitude of ways. She is obviously never unoccupied. She is clearly a much-loved figure in Janjanbureh where she owns a small house and compound. It was an inspiring experience to hear her talk with such enthusiasm about what is being achieved.