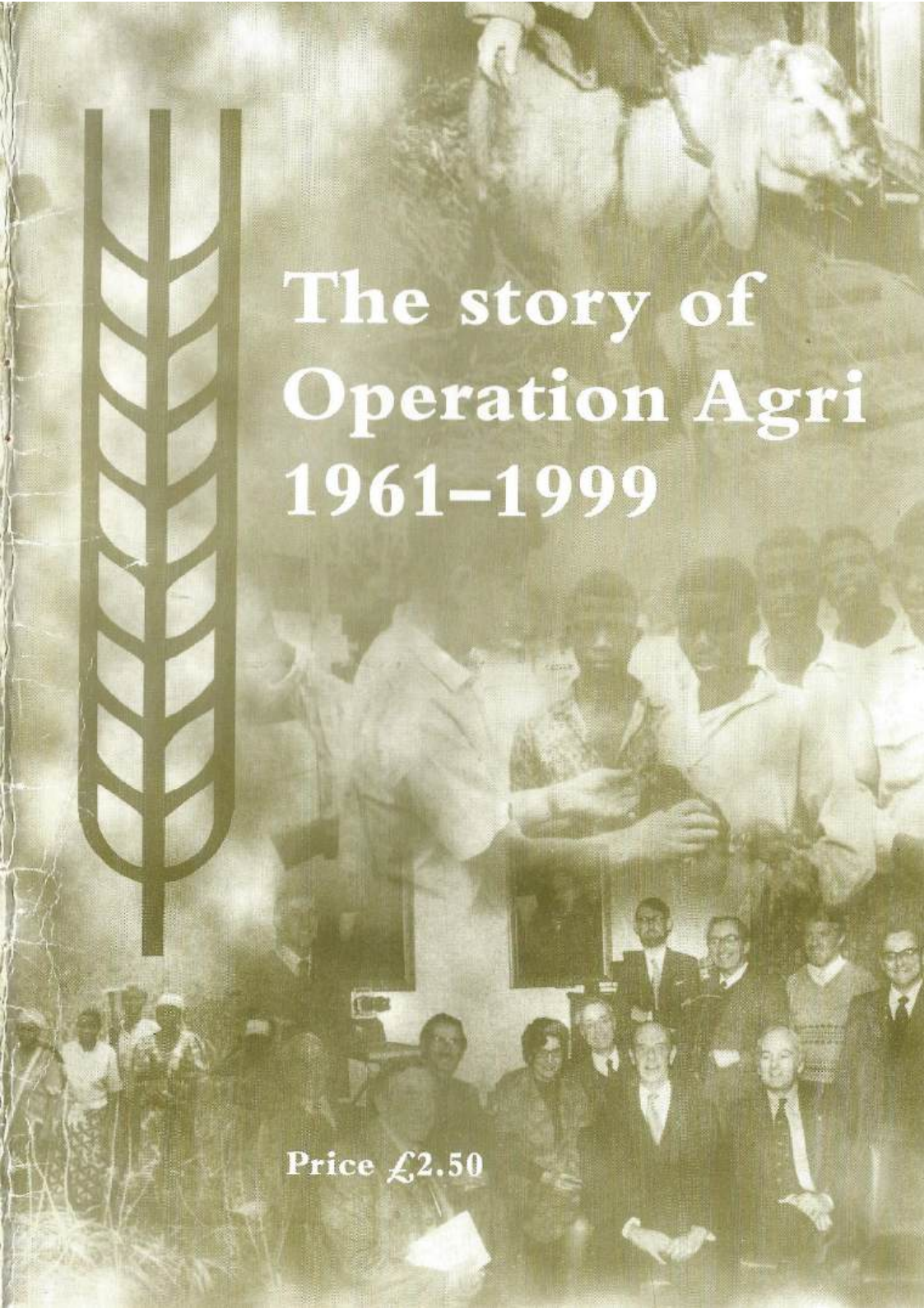




The story of Operation Agri 1961–1999

Price £2.50

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The Early Beginnings: The years to 1970

Missionaries called by God to work for him in lands overseas must have the support of those who remain at home. Even Paul, the first Christian missionary, though he boasted that he was chargeable to no man (2 Corinthians 11:9), also gloried in the support he received from the brethren from Macedonia. In just the same way, the first missionary of modern times, William Carey, was continually writing back to this country for the various things he found he needed in order to do God's work in Calcutta and Bengal.

In the archives of the Baptist Missionary Society are letters from Carey asking, amongst other things, for seeds to help the Indian people grow more beneficial crops. It is not well known, perhaps, that Carey's interest in plants led to the founding of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India and the establishment of the Horticultural Gardens in Calcutta.

One does not normally associate Carey with agriculture and horticulture although he was always closely involved with the needs of the Bengali people. Many BMS missionaries in subsequent years doubtless grew their own vegetables and a few, perhaps, kept some livestock, to enhance their diets. They had points of contact sharing husbandry hints with interested local folk.

Was it, however, Jim Scott, a BMS missionary in China since 1922, who moved things to a new plane upon his return to Britain following the Second World War? He wrote an article in the BMS journal *The Missionary Herald* entitled 'Wanted: Agricultural Missionaries'. The only apparent result was that Jim found himself in correspondence with David Stockley a young agriculturalist. After many disappointments and much persuasion, this pioneer farming missionary finally convinced the BMS of his call to the mission field in 1952.

David had been born in China of a missionary family and completed his education by studying agriculture at Writtle Agricultural College (Essex). At that time churches overseas were not fully awakened to the missionary potential of agriculture and horticulture so it proved very difficult to find an invitation



Joyce and David Stockley – land-rover provided by Operation Agri

for David in the countries where the BMS was working. Finally a place was found for him at Khulna in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and an invitation received from the Baptist Sangha.

There was a house and a considerable area of land at Khulna which the BMS in conjunction with the local Baptist Sangha made available for an agricultural project. Additionally, BMS accepted responsibility for the support of David, his wife and children. It was understood that the Baptist Sangha of Pakistan would provide tools and equipment as its share in the scheme.

However, David experienced frustration because the Baptist Sangha were unable to provide the tools and supplies needed. He wrote therefore to the Assistant Secretary of BMS at that time, Rev Alex Wilson, suggesting that he invite British Sunday Schools to send vegetable seeds to help the Bengali people. David also needed tools and day-old chicks. Alex circulated Baptist churches with these needs and was soon inundated with loads of small parcels containing packets of seeds for David Stockley. These were put together in larger consignments by Mission House staff and sent off to Khulna. Unfortunately, many of the varieties and types were unsuitable. Quite a lot of the packets were the remnants of sowings in Britain over past years and the germination was often poor by the time they arrived at Khulna. Even so, David persisted with his requests, creating unmanageable workloads for the already overworked Mission House staff.

News of the potential for agricultural missionary work spread. Various mission fields sent requests for the appointment of agricultural specialists and trained personnel were offering their services to the Society. It seemed logical to many Christians in Britain that it was better to demonstrate the love of God to people in lesser developed countries by providing training in the production of better food and improved living conditions than to preach the Word alone.

The second agricultural missionary to be appointed was John Smith who went with his wife to Diptipur in Orissa (India) where there was a plot of land available for his use and a history of drought and famine amongst the local people. He founded the West Utkal Agricultural Centre at Diptipur in 1959 and started looking at various ways of improving the local crops and livestock. He, too, found that he needed assistance from Britain in the form of tools, seeds and livestock and wrote to Alex Wilson with a long list of requirements.

Alan Casebow, soon followed, destined for Yalembe in the Upper River area of what was then the Belgian Congo. This was the centre both for training and theological education known as the École Grenfell and also for church outreach into the Turumbu Forest area. Any agriculture in the rain forest requires that first a clearing should be made. Trees and scrub have to be cut down, roots removed wherever possible and the rubbish burned. The resulting wood ash enriches the soil. Crops of cassava, maize or upland rice can then be grown. However, rain forest soils lose their fertility very quickly once cleared and, unlike forests in Europe, the land can support only two or three years of cropping before it must be allowed to revert to a forest fallow period.

This "slash and burn" system has been criticised on ecological grounds in recent years but should be considered in context. Forests are actually enriched when small plots are cut, rubbish burned, crops grown for two or three years and then allowed to revert to rain forest for another 20 years or so. Ecological problems arise when entire forests are cleared and never allowed to revert back.

Villagers also kept goats and some sheep, along with small chickens. Alan decided that the first priority lay in improving the poultry and wrote asking for day-old chicks of a superior breed.

Then Ian Pitkethly was appointed to work in Angola near Quibocolo. Angola at that time was a Portuguese colony with a long history of missionary development. When he, too, started writing to Alex Wilson for agricultural requisites, it became obvious that the needs of these agricultural missionaries were so many and varied that the existing Secretariat at Mission House had neither the time nor the knowledge to locate sources and supplies.

Alex Wilson shared his problem with Cyril Petch who was then the Secretary of the Baptist Men's Movement which shared the offices in Mission House. It so happened that BMM was at that time looking for an overseas missionary project as part of the Movement's activities. It had been founded in 1917 as the

Baptist Laymen's Missionary Movement to support the Baptist Missionary Society but, over the years, the emphasis had shifted almost entirely to work amongst men in the home churches of the denomination. Agricultural work overseas seemed to be an ideal project for BMM to adopt.

Cyril Petch felt that BMM should be able to call on some agricultural specialists within its ranks to assist the Society. Some time previously the title '**Operation Agri**' had been coined by Alex Wilson and David Stockley for the work of supplying the missionaries with their agricultural requisites; Cyril suggested that, if suitable people could be found, BMM would take on the responsibility for organising and developing Operation Agri.

Cyril shared his ideas with the National Council of the Movement and found that one of the Regional Commissioners, Fred Webb, from Wendover in Buckinghamshire, a horticulturalist working with an agricultural chemical company, was interested in helping organise BMM Operation Agri. Later that same year, 1960, Cyril pressurised an agricultural lecturer in Kent, Michael Putnam, to become Regional Commissioner for Kent and Sussex and also take an interest in Operation Agri.

The whole concept was discussed by the BMM Annual General Meeting at Swanwick in March 1961 and the Movement accepted responsibility for raising funds and despatching all the items required for the agricultural extension work of the four agricultural missionaries. Michael Putnam was appointed Secretary and Fred Webb, Treasurer of BMM Operation Agri and they were given the responsibility of creating interest and awareness, raising funds, communicating with the missionaries to determine their needs and to find the best ways of supplying them.

Following a late night discussion at Swanwick between Cyril Petch, Fred Webb and Michael Putnam, it was decided to raise an immediate fund for promotion expenses and an appeal was made to the men at the conference; before the end of the weekend, £200 had been collected to start the funds. A '**Farming Partner**' scheme was conceived in which members of the Movement and any other people who were interested in the work were invited to subscribe a minimum annual sum of five shillings and become partners in the project. This scheme was promoted nationally through the Movement, through men's groups and through churches and the numbers of enrolled Farming Partners rose swiftly and their contributions raised £500 in the first year, £1,000 a year later and £2,500 by 1966.

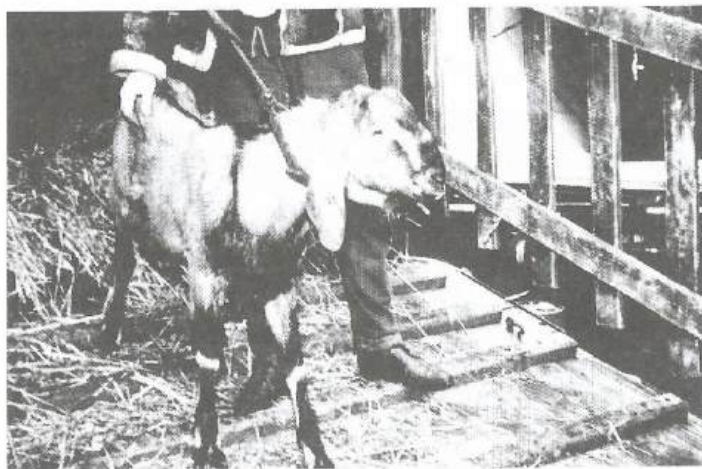
Clubs and churches arranged special events and made donations towards the work so money was soon available to meet the needs of the missionaries.

The scheme to provide seeds for David Stockley to distribute in the Khulna area was continued for a while and arrangements were made for collections of unopened seed packets to be sent into the warehouse of Baker Britt, a storage and transport contractor whose principal was F J Britt, a BMM member from Southend. It was not long, however, before that had to cease. East Pakistan, India and most other countries demanded phytosanitary certificates for each batch of seeds to verify that they were free of diseases. Requests for seeds had then to be met by buying in bulk from recognised seed merchants whose seeds were batch tested and certified free of disease; gifts of money rather than packets of seeds were then needed.

Amongst the early requests in 1962 and 1963 were goats and day-old chicks. Both David Stockley in East Pakistan and Alan Casebow in Congo asked for chicks. A suitable source of crossbred Rhode Island Red and Light Sussex chickens was located in Essex and several batches of chicks sent abroad by air freight. The despatch to Khulna was the most successful and it is said that the descendants of those first chicks can still be found in that part of Bengal.

In India, John Smith felt that the best way forward was to improve the goat population around Diptipur. David Stockley also thought that goats would be a good thing at Khulna. The first action in the goat supply project was to buy four young females and a male in Britain and send them by ship to Dacca for David Stockley to collect. Anglo-Nubian goats were chosen, purchased and despatched. On the sea voyage they were fed and watered by the ship's butcher! They all arrived safely, full of vitality, and were transported by road and ferry to Khulna. The pedigree certificates were made out in the name of the Movement and, for a while, Cyril Petch was heard to refer to himself as Chief Billy!

It was an expensive operation to send goats from Britain all the way to the Indian sub-continent so, when the next request for goats was received from John Smith, it was felt that locally-obtained but improved quality goats might be more economical and show better stewardship. He was provided with the necessary funds for a 1,000-mile journey to the area north of the river Jumna to buy Jumnapari goats. In appearance these are very similar – and could well be closely related – to the Anglo-Nubians sent to David Stockley. The vehicle chosen for the journey was a converted ambulance. After much bargaining the chosen goats were loaded onto the ambulance for the long return journey. They were stopped on one occasion by the local police who were rather



*Jumnapari goat
brought by John
Smith to Diptipur
from North India*

confounded by the sight of a bearded Englishman wearing only shorts, driving an ambulance full of goats!

The success of the agricultural missionary work encouraged others to offer their services to the BMS for work overseas. Alan Ball, a graduate of Reading University was one such candidate. There were further openings in Congo at this time so it was suggested that Alan should work at Kimpese in the Lower River region.

Then came a series of political upheavals. Internal strife in Congo after the departure of the Belgians and the formation of the Republic of Zaire with civil



*John Smith giving
practical training*

war in some areas led to the return to UK of Alan Casebow. Similarly the departure of the Portuguese from Angola resulted in the speedy recall of Ian Pitkethly. A short while later, John Smith indicated that the health of his family was suffering because of the climate in India - in particular, one of his twin sons was blind - and he withdrew from missionary work.

For a short while in the mid 1960s, Alan Ball was the only agricultural missionary with the BMS in Africa and David Stockley the only one in the sub-continent of India. Alan Casebow still had a strong call to missionary work associated with agricultural development and agreed to undertake further language study so that he could take over the work at the West Utkal Agricultural Centre in Diptipur from John Smith. Ian Pitkethly moved to what was, by then, Zaire and found that he needed little language adaptation to start working in the Lower River region of Zaire, particularly amongst the many Angolan refugees who were flocking into that country. Whereas Alan Ball had been particularly conscious of the need to improve crop growing and had introduced plots of crops for the trainees at EPI, Kimpese, (the school for pastors and teachers) with irrigation facilities provided by Operation Agri, Ian Pitkethly was more concerned with poultry and established a large scale breeding and rearing unit at CEDECO, Kimpese (the ecumenical agricultural and development training centre). The scheme was very successful. Large numbers of improved chicks were hatched from the breeder flocks. Eggs were incubated in large incubators provided by Operation Agri and the chicks grown on to about 7 weeks old



*Ian Pitkethly
giving poultry
advice*

before being given away in groups of 6 or less/more depending on the needs of the individual, together with feed for ten days and instructions on how to keep and feed them.

Meanwhile the Committee organising the fund raising and supply of items to the field had expanded. In addition to Cyril Petch as Chairman, and the two original officers, it was necessary to appoint a part-time worker as Assistant Secretary with responsibility for the Farming Partner scheme. Peter Hewlett of Sevenoaks, who had retired early as poultry products manager for the largest animal feed producing firm in Britain, agreed to work three mornings a week. His help was particularly needed for the writing and despatch of the quarterly *Operation Agri News*, keeping in touch with the 2500 Farming Partners and, at Christmas, sending out the Operation Agri Christmas cards which were then a part of the fund raising activities.

In the mid- to late-1960s one or two Baptist churches, on their own initiative, decided to introduce the theme of overseas agriculture to their Harvest Festival services. It was then becoming clear that church congregations in many parts of the country were so far removed from the harvest of the land that the traditional harvest thanksgiving services had little direct significance. Moreover many churches were having difficulty in finding recipients for the produce which had been on display in the church.

This new emphasis on overseas conditions compared to our own bountiful harvests gave a fresh impetus to the harvest celebrations of those churches who adopted this approach. While Operation Agri was very grateful for the gifts and donations of the churches who adopted this approach to their harvest celebrations, it was not until the end of the 1960s that Operation Agri decided to make a direct appeal for funds, related to harvest thanksgiving services.

There was a change of officers during the mid-1960s. Fred Webb resigned as treasurer and his place was taken by Charles Bland who was an Inspector of Taxes and had no direct agricultural connection but had an excellent grasp of accounting. Michael Putnam withdrew as secretary – a task which Cyril Petch took over from the headquarters office of the Baptist Men's Movement which, being in the same building as the Baptist Missionary Society, ensured a very close liaison between the two organisations. Then, after a short while, Fred Ince, a farmer in East Anglia was appointed Chairman, Stan Crees, an animal technician, was made purchasing officer, and Russell Ashley-Smith, together with his father, Bill, was given the responsibility of publicity. This new team took Operation Agri into the 1970s.

The work expands 1970 - 1980

The establishment of agricultural missionaries remained static for a while. David Stockley moved within East Pakistan from Khulna to Chandraghona where he became responsible for developing the farmland attached to the Leprosy Hospital as a means of employing some ex-leprosy patients and providing food for the hospital. He also worked with some of the local farms in the Rangunia Thana and was soon spending a lot of time helping to develop a Rangunia Farmers' Co-operative. Alan Casebow was hard at work at Diptipur in India developing the goat herd and improving the crop-growing of the area by the introduction of vegetable crops and irrigation schemes. Ian Pitkethly was extending the poultry scheme at Kimpese but Alan Ball returned to the UK and withdrew from missionary service. During the 1970's a succession of voluntary workers went out to Kimpese to assist with the work there. To start with they worked with Ian but, as his wife began to show increasing signs of illness, the Pitkethleys had to withdraw and the work was left in the hands of the short-term workers. These were Keith Hallam, Jeannie Flowers, Barry Westin and Jon Spiller.

Two new agricultural projects were developed. CBFZ, the Baptist Church organisation in Zaire, asked for an agricultural missionary to develop some land they owned at Ntondo in the middle of the country. Almost at the same time, the Baptist Association in the state of Parana in Brazil became interested in developing an agricultural project.

John Mellor, a horticulturist, was appointed as an agricultural missionary to Ntondo. He decided that there were two priorities: to clear the church land of trees and try out some better crops, and to develop a poultry breeding unit to supply meat birds to relieve some of the serious local hunger problems. He asked for implements and seeds for the land, and poultry and breeding equipment to establish the project. These were supplied by Operation Agri and supplemented as necessary.

Walter Fulbrook, a pastoral missionary with an interest in farming, pioneered his way into the Litoral region of Parana. At that time there was no road, only



Zairois women anxious to have their picture taken while in the background their menfolk buy chicks from John Mellor

river transport. A road was marked for development so he went to land owned by the church in a small village called Potinga which would be close to the new road when it was built. He built a house on the land and planted some citrus trees; he also constructed some farm buildings in which he started a poultry unit. After his pioneering work, Frank Gouthwaite was appointed to continue the work at Potinga. Before he arrived there, the new road was built making communication easier with the city of Curitiba, with the local towns of Antonia and Morretes and also with the other small village churches nearby.

Back home the appeal for funds at harvest time became rather complicated because both Operation Agri and the Baptist Missionary Society were appealing separately for agricultural missionary work. This led to considerable confusion which was only resolved by the two bodies coming together to make a joint



A Harvest display featuring Operation Agri

appeal, sharing both the costs of despatching material and the income from the appeal. These joint appeals proved very successful and have continued each year since their introduction, to the extent that the share received by Operation Agri is now one of the major financial inputs available for funding the purchases of items needed by the missionaries and grants for their local expenses.

Cyril Petch moved from his office as BMM secretary to a pastorate in Yorkshire and his place as secretary of BMM and secretary of Operation Agri was taken by Ray Montacute. Charles Bland, the treasurer, began to lose his sight and had to resign his office. Bill Lloyd was appointed in his place but, two years later, felt that he wished to be relieved of the work, and Michael Putnam - who had been secretary in the early years - was appointed treasurer in his place.

Many of the countries where agricultural missionaries were working were suffering from political unrest. East Pakistan went through a civil war and divided itself from the administration in West Pakistan, forming the new state of Bangladesh. David Stockley stayed there throughout the troubles which were preceded by one of the worst cyclonic floods ever known around the Bay of Bengal. Crops were washed out of the ground and all the seed was lost. This



*Transplanting rice
in Bangladesh*

was a blessing in a way because it made possible the provision of replacement rice seed of improved strains with higher yields and a shorter growing season than the native varieties. David was held in very high regard by the people of Bangladesh for staying with them and helping them through this very difficult time. Many stories - some apocryphal perhaps - grew out of David's work in

Bangladesh. One visiting British politician on an official visit to Bangladesh asked David: *"Why are agricultural missionaries needed in Bangladesh? Does not the country produce its own agricultural advisers? What difference can there be between the help they can give and the help you can give?"* David thought for a moment and then replied: *"Yes, there are Bangladeshi agricultural advisers but they stand at the edge of the field telling people what to do. The agricultural missionary goes into the field and helps the farmer to do it."*

Nevertheless all agricultural missionaries found it an uphill task to change farming practices which were traditional to the country. Another story told of David Stockley related to the need to remove the water hyacinth which was choking the irrigation canals and the need to produce compost to aid soil fertility. David wanted to grow sweet potatoes so he chose to dig the trenches at eight o'clock in the morning in a field beside the road when all the men were walking past on their way to market. He made sure that he was seen dragging armfuls of water hyacinth out of the nearby canal and laying them in the base of the trench before planting the yams. A magnificent crop resulted and David laid the heavy crop to dry on top of the dug soil for everybody to see. Next season all the local farmers stripped the canals of water hyacinth to manure their sweet potatoes. Not a word was said, not a lecture was given and nothing was written in the local paper. It just happened because they had observed David – as he had intended they should.

In 1975, Colin Foulkes, another agriculturally trained missionary, was sent to Bangladesh. His impression of that country with its warm climate, fertile alluvial soil and high water table, was that it was a growers' paradise! In response to the human situation he adopted a three-pronged approach – demonstration, integration and persuasion. He grew a wide variety of nutritious foods both in and outside traditional seasons on demonstration plots on two highly visible sites on the Barisal and Khulna Mission lands. He was able to give away seeds and plants, and used villagers' land in outlying areas to show how new ideas could be integrated into existing farming systems. He also attempted to persuade farmers and growers to try new products and extend the growing season using simple techniques and available materials. Although his four year period of service yielded only limited responses, the villagers were always pleased that a foreigner had been prepared to leave the comforts of western civilisation for a while to work with them. The discouraged Christian minorities of rural Bangladesh especially valued this demonstration of love and concern. Colin returned after this period of service and took a lecturing position in an agricultural college and continued to use his experience to help the Operation Agri Committee in many different ways.

Zaire was in extreme economic difficulty during this period with many riots and civil disturbances. Some missionaries were temporarily withdrawn until the problems were over. Even when they went back, the economic difficulties of the country were only too apparent – there was no petrol or diesel, no soap, no margarine and very little food in the country.

Similar economic hardships were also affecting Brazil and India. They reacted by putting very high import taxes on all goods brought into the country from overseas. The intention was to force people who wanted goods to buy locally made items and thus improve the country's economy and avoid money going overseas. This proved very difficult for the work of Operation Agri which had provided items to the missionaries in these countries free of foreign exchange charges. In order to counter these restrictions, there was a gradual move from buying goods in the UK to making money grants through the BMS for the purchase of items within the countries.



The scale of this Diptipur "Food for Work" irrigation canal can be judged by the white cow to the right of the bridge

There were not only economic hardships but also serious drought problems in Orissa (India). Alan Casebow in Diptipur decided to mount a 'Food for Work' scheme to fulfil the double function of providing essential food aid and also of using available labour to build reservoirs and irrigation canals so that drought could not affect the people so seriously in future. One day's work merited one kilogram of wheat and the payment of one rupee. Half way through the scheme Alan returned home on furlough and, in order to keep the work going, John Smith obtained leave of absence from his lecturing post and returned to India for six months. While much had been done in the ten years he had been away, he found that he could almost take over where he had left off. Alan Casebow returned to India for another two years before finally deciding that he should

withdraw from missionary service for the sake of his family. The Church of North India subsequently appointed an Indian pastor, Reuben Senapati, to take over the agricultural development work at Diptipur.



Frank Gouthwaite (left) discusses the characteristics of CEBADER's bull with a local farmer

In Brazil, Frank Gouthwaite introduced passion fruit to the farm at Potinga which was given the project title CEBADER (the Baptist Centre for Rural Development). He also started a pig unit with enhanced feeding methods, purchased two cows and a bull of improved milk production standards, and planted sugar cane and grazing pastures.

Meanwhile Fred Ince, Operation Agri's chairman, died suddenly and Peter Hewlett, who had faithfully looked after the Farming Partner scheme for 10 years, was appointed chairman in his place. Ray Montacute finished his term of service as BMM and OA Secretary and Fred Eldred was temporarily appointed to these posts until Maurice Abbot was appointed in 1976. The Committee was expanded by the inclusion of Jack Last (a farmer from Suffolk) and David Hitchcock who assisted Stan Crees in purchasing and liaison work. David Stockley, in the same year, was honoured by the award of OBE, *"for outstanding service to agricultural development in Bangladesh"*.

At the end of the 1970s there were three countries with agricultural development projects supported by Operation Agri through the work of BMS missionaries: Zaire (Ntondo and Kimpese), Brazil (Potinga) and Bangladesh. David Stockley had moved from Rangunia to the south-west of Bangladesh to take over the rural development work of the National Christian Council of Bangladesh centred at Gournadi. Two ministers with pastoral responsibility in Bangladesh were

also involved in agricultural work. Land at Dinajpur and Rangpur was brought under cultivation first by Gwyn Lewis and then by Bob Young. Bob arranged with Operation Agri to buy pairs of ploughing oxen which he made available to the local farmers who had no motive power of their own. Bob took a further short course in agriculture while home on furlough in order to be better able to develop the agricultural cropping. Further north still in Bangladesh, John Passmore found that he could best help the local people in this very poor district by assisting them with farming. Both Bob and John introduced wheat-growing and vegetables to the localities.

The work at Ntondo around this time was helped by Peter Schwier - a short service worker from a farming family in East Anglia. Under John Mellor's direction, the poultry project had slowly increased in size and land clearance had begun. With Peter's additional help, more land was cleared and a lot of time was spent on the maintenance of the tractor, Land-Rover and other equipment. The nearest town is Mbandaka, 80 miles away, so staff at Ntondo had to be self sufficient. Jack Norwood, a lecturer in engineering in Essex, became interested in the work and, because of Ntondo's remoteness and lack of fuel, designed a solar-powered incubator for use there. This machine needed

only small inputs of external fuel and ran for most of the time on power from the sun. While the Mark 1 design was being built by the men of the Southend churches, Jack was designing the Mark 2 version with a much larger capacity. However, the OA committee wondered whether Ntondo was the best place for such an incubator and sent Michael Putnam out to Zaire to make recommendations for its future. In his report, he concluded that the Ntondo project was badly needed and, if the BMS could guarantee continuity of staffing, the poultry project with the establishment of a solar-powered incubator should go ahead. A year later, Jack Norwood took 12 months' "sabbatical" leave and went to Ntondo to do some of the necessary construction and maintenance work and set up the incubator.



Solar panels that powered the incubators at Ntondo

The Operation Agri committee at this time heard with regret of the death of Peter Hewlett who had served as Farming Partner secretary and chairman. A year earlier he had resigned from both positions because of failing sight and ill-health. Audrey Sheppard was looking after Farming Partners in addition to her responsibilities as membership secretary of BMM and Cecil Richards, a former president of BMM, was appointed chairman.



*The Operation
Agri Committee
in 1977*

An agricultural advisory committee was established by the BMS to assist with the work of advising and helping the missionaries overseas. Michael Putnam and Cecil Richards were asked to join this new committee to represent Operation Agri. Following his report on the Ntongo project, Michael Putnam was asked to visit Bangladesh and then Brazil to prepare reports and recommendations on those projects.

One of the results of this increased interchange between members of the committee and the work overseas was the realisation that the problems of development in the countries where the missionaries were working were not confined to agriculture but had much broader implications. The provision of clean water, sanitation, community health and basic education were all part of a wider requirement for rural development alongside the needs for better crops and livestock. It was clear that no amount of food would provide for the needs of people in these countries unless it was provided under conditions where the people could benefit – particularly from reduced parasite burdens and fewer communicable diseases. These benefits were dependent on clean water, sanitation and the people's understanding of public health issues. Following a

recommendation from the OA committee, BMM agreed to extend the Operation Agri terms of reference so that it could assist more comprehensive development projects with which the Baptist Missionary Society was involved.

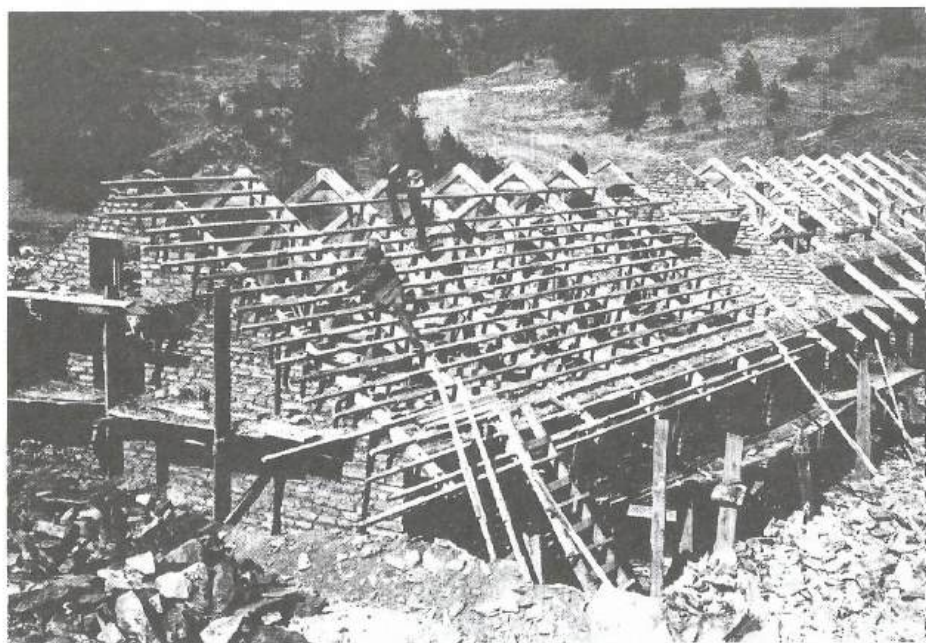
During his year in Zaire, Jack Norwood had found time to repair and re-establish the water supply for the hospital at Ntongo. He shared with BMS staff and with the committee of Operation Agri his concern about the non-availability of clean water for the village people. He suggested that shallow wells could be provided in strategic places in Ntongo and surrounding villages and he would design a simple lift pump that could be made locally from available materials. The Zairean water project was born!



A new well and hand pump in Zaire

The provision of suitable wells was not just a simple matter of digging holes in the ground in the middle of villages. Locations had to be found where there was unlikely to be contamination from sewage and yet were within easy reach of the village centres. After suitable places had been selected and wells dug, the water had to be tested to ensure freedom from coliform bacteria. This required the use of a water-testing kit with a culturing incubator/oven. This work began while Ian Morris and Roger Foster were the development missionaries based at Ntongo. Steve Mantle joined the team later with responsibility for the extension of the water project to other areas of Zaire.

An opportunity to assist with rural development in Nepal was brought to the notice of the Operation Agri committee by BMS officers alerted to the need by Allan Davies when he was seconded by the Society to work with the United Mission to Nepal in Jumla. Allan reported that help was needed in the building and establishment of Karnali Technical School which would provide courses and training in construction, agriculture and community health. Young people in this remote region of Nepal were eager to attend these courses and, when



Construction work at the Karnali Technical School in Nepal

trained, would be able to spread new ideas and techniques over a wide area. The problem was a lack of training facilities; Operation Agri agreed to help by providing funds of £10,000 a year for four years to establish the development and training resources. The overall plans for Jumla were far-reaching. In addition to the provision of technical training facilities, there were proposals for primary school teacher training, a health clinic with a community health programme, aids to the local community in the provision of smokeless stoves and agricultural development schemes which included a reafforestation programme.

During this period there were also changes in the administration of Operation Agri. Maurice Abbott completed his term as secretary of the BMM. Rev Edgar Brown was appointed his successor and agreed to act as secretary of Operation Agri. Miss Joan Motum was appointed Farming Partner secretary to allow Mrs Audrey Sheppard to concentrate on the day-to-day work of the BMM.

John Corbett, a personal member of the BMM with a particular interest in communication by radio, offered to help the BMS establish a radio network between mission stations in Zaire. Communication between Kinshasa and the outlying stations had always been a problem and, since telephones were

impossible, radio provided the most suitable means of contact. Since visits to the individual stations were necessary in order to establish the network and because the plan would help to develop the area, Operation Agri agreed to pay a proportion of the overall costs. John and his wife Margaret (both licensed radio amateurs) were accepted by the BMS for a short service period as missionaries in Zaire. After a term training at St. Andrews Hall, Selly Oak, and a crash course in French in Brussels, they arrived in Kinshasa in September 1986 for a period of two years.

Whilst in Zaire, they repaired all the broken communication equipment, replaced the older valve transceivers with modern transistor sets and installed radio equipment at four new locations. They converted twelve of the transceivers to solar power after finding that fully charged 12-volt car batteries were often "borrowed", making the radio unserviceable.

Many of these transceivers are used for communications related to rural development. Operation Agri therefore felt justified in meeting about half the costs of the Corbetts' work to improve the radio network throughout the rural work of the CBFZ (the Baptist Church organisation in Zaire).



Angela Hinchliffe at Bolobo, using the transceiver

Development through Partner Churches 1980 - 1990

Broader interpretations of the role of rural development led to expansions of the various projects in several countries in conjunction with the Partner Churches of the BMS. An early expansion of the concept of outreach was support for the work of Sue Headlam based at Chandraghona in Bangladesh. Sue originally went to Chandraghona as a nurse at the Leprosy Hospital there. In the late 1970s, when the work at the hospital was less demanding, she felt called to help mothers and babies in the nearby villages. She established a series of clinics for mothers with children under five years which she visited on a regular basis to provide vaccinations, medicines, and general nutritional and medical advice. Through these clinics she was made aware of two important conditions: first



*Mothers and children
attending an under-
fives clinic in the
Chittagong Hill Tracts*

that one of the main health problems of the region was internal parasitic worms with continuous re-infestation through sewage-contaminated drinking water; and, second, that the village women were an untapped resource for change, restricted by ignorance, illiteracy and male domination. With the aid of regular grants from Operation Agri, Sue extended the work of the clinics to include literacy classes to help them to read and understand public health issues, and established part time work activities for the women. These included cloth weaving which later grew into a cottage factory producing shirts and other

clothes. For the first time the local women were able to earn money by their own activities and take the first steps into a more equal society.

In some countries, where BMS missionaries were no longer able to obtain visas, work originally started by agricultural missionaries continued under the direction of local agriculturalists and pastors. For example, when Alan Casebow returned to UK from Diptipur, the agricultural outreach continued under the direction of Rev Reuben Senapati. The Sambalpur Diocese of the Church of North India is unable to make very much money available for rural extension work because of its own relative poverty. Both Bishop Tandy and Reuben Senapati appealed to the BMS and Operation Agri for further financial help. They even visited the UK and met with various bodies, including the Operation Agri Committee, to describe the contemplated rural development programme. It was then agreed that further funds would be sent and the work supported, subject to satisfactory reports being received through the Diocesan office and from the BMS Overseas Regional Representatives.

Reuben Senapati has developed the West Utkal Agricultural Centre as a demonstration farm with new crops, improved varieties of seeds, different techniques and new ideas for stock feeding and handling. He is also involved in a wide range of other local development projects. Drought is one major problem in Orissa and this had been recognised by John Smith and Alan Casebow when they were in Diptipur. The main monsoon rain, which only falls for a few weeks, brings most of the water for the year and sometimes there is not enough to last for the next 10 months. Reuben has extended the tank reservoirs originally built under Alan Casebow's direction and helped other nearby villages to build similar ponds. He has provided staff to dig wells and irrigation channels and is



Manual irrigation of a rice field in Orissa

tackling local village water problems one by one. This work is almost never ending, continuing through the 1990s and will be a feature of his work in the early years of the next century.

Fuel is another problem in Orissa. The Indian government is promoting the development of biogas plants which use cattle manure to generate methane gas and is subsidising their construction in rural areas. Reuben has persuaded many small farmers to build biogas plants and provided trained staff to help. He has started a "seed bank" so that local farmers can "borrow" seeds and pay back in kind after harvest. This has provided impetus for the growth of more local vegetables.

Not content with helping only the nearby villages, he has travelled into the Kond Hills to areas with even fewer facilities and is developing demonstration farms and teaching centres in Harlanga and Rampur.

The funds needed to provide all that Reuben and the projects require for this work are greater than Operation Agri alone can provide. They are also supported by Tear Fund and by other similar agencies in the UK and in North America.

Bangladesh is another area where visas for missionaries are difficult to obtain. David and Joyce Stockley were amongst the first casualties and were unable to return after a period of home assignment. As very experienced agricultural missionaries without a specific appointment, they were asked to visit projects in other parts of the world and advise on possible areas of development. The first place they visited was Ntondo in Zaire where they spent several weeks studying all aspects of the work and prepared a very thorough report suggesting new crop projects, fish culture and an increase in the extension activities to other villages in the area. Rice, in fact, was found to grow very well on the swampy lands.

The results of the Stockleys' visit and report were followed up by Steve and Pam Seymour, newly appointed to agricultural work by the BMS. They did not find this an easy task because the project's right-hand man since its inception, Tata Loleka, had retired and other church-appointed managers seemed less dedicated. An airstrip was constructed close to the village so that the small planes of the Missionary Aviation Fellowship could come in direct from Kinshasa and elsewhere in Zaire. From Ntondo visits could be made by road, by canoe, bicycle and plane to many of the surrounding villages where it would have been possible for trained extension staff to try to draw together the five threads of extension work - better food production, clean water, improved sanitation,

community health and basic education. Unfortunately, without Tata Loleka's help, no other Ntondo personnel seemed prepared to work with the Seymour's to extend development work beyond their own village boundaries.

Then, in 1985, David and Joyce went to Potinga, in Brazil to make a practical assessment of the future potential for the CEBADER farm in the area. Under Frank and Peggy Gouthwaite's direction, CEBADER had become involved in a wide rural development programme including such aspects as clean water supplies, community health education and pre-school education. The Parana Baptist Convention decided, however, to concentrate on agricultural aid to the local farmers. As a result of their visit and report, David and Joyce were invited back for 6 months, during the Gouthwaites' long furlough, to implement the proposals. In spite of not being able to speak Portuguese, they managed to work with the farm manager and staff using sign language. They successfully contour terraced the hilly land, established trial plots of many different kinds of crops and developed the pig herd and poultry flocks. They established themselves in the local church at Potinga and the people were very reluctant to say goodbye.

After much discussion in Potinga, in Curitiba (the capital city of Parana) and in London it was agreed that the Stockleys would take a short furlough and then return to Potinga for two or three years. This gave the Brazilian Baptists the opportunity to re-locate Frank and Peggy Gouthwaite to another pioneering task in the Pantanal Region of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, based on Campo Grande, a poverty-stricken part of Brazil. Frank found an urgent need for education at all levels in the villages, a need for vocational training, an appalling lack of health education and knowledge of first aid. There was also a great need for an agricultural stimulus within small farms in the area. Frank and Peggy worked as closely as possible with the municipal government and received funding from the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission as well as Operation Agri. Their main request to Operation Agri was for tools or for a grant to buy what they needed locally.

Mike and Daveen Wilson began a pioneering work in the North East of Brazil, which is the poorest part of that huge country – indeed, it is the largest poverty-stricken area in the American continents. After a fact-finding year they chose to live in a rural area of scattered homesteads known as Trapia, 40 kilometres from Mossoro, in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte. Mike introduced some new agricultural concepts but acceptance and development proved difficult because their first four years in the area coincided with a severe drought. Daveen was shocked by the high infant mortality rate and worked hard encouraging mothers to breastfeed their babies, setting an example by breastfeeding her

own three children during this time. Simple health measures such as oral rehydration and water filters also proved successful in improving child health, and infant mortality is now outstandingly low for the region. Mary Parsons, a BMS colleague from the next state, came every month for a year to help train a group of local leaders in primary health care. Another large strand of their



*Mike Wilson
with local farmers
in Trapia, Brazil*

work has been the Sunday School, which has helped greatly to improve literacy, and the weekly Bible studies, where the primary aim has been to improve folk's self esteem as they came to realise how much God valued them.

One country where missionaries were still welcomed was Zaire, although the political climate has not always been sympathetic because it was laid down at the time that Zairians should be in charge of all organisations and projects. CBFZ started two new projects, one in the Upper River area, called the TELEMA project, and the other in the Lower River area, centred on Ngombe Lutete. The first director at the Telema project was Citizen Chebele who trained in the Faculty of Agronomy at Yangambi. He took over from Mr Niyonkuru who had been moved to the CBFZ Upper River Development Office but was available as a consultant. TELEMA is divided into two sites, one on each bank of the river Zaire - at Yakamba and at Lilanda, some 20 miles apart (including a wide river crossing). This enables people living on both sides of the river to feel that the project relates to them. There are demonstration plots of crops and varieties on each site, and staff extended the work into the villages with courses and instruction.

Under the direction of CBFZ, Michael and Carol King developed the Lower River project with a central farm and teaching unit at Ngombe Lutete and satellite units in about 12 of the villages nearby. A Land Rover and a tractor were provided by Operation Agri for the use of the project. Unfortunately it took more than a year for the tractor to reach the Lower River. At one time it was thought that it had been "lost in transit" after being off-loaded from the cargo boat at the port of Matadi. Then, a few months later it turned up in a customs pound with the authorities demanding huge import duties. When, finally, the customs duties were paid and the tractor released, it took several weeks to get it delivered to Ngombe Lutete. When it eventually arrived some of the attachments had been lost or stolen. These were replaced either with items sent out from Britain or with those which could be purchased locally.

The tractor and its ancillary equipment were soon being put to good use in the fields in the vicinity of the project. While its principal use was on the project's own land, it was also available, with its driver, to cultivate other land nearby for a small charge. It was not long before this heavy use took its toll and the hydraulic linkage snapped. This was "repaired" locally but soon broke again. Discussions with experts in Britain indicated that the tractor should have been equipped with a heavy duty hydraulic linkage for the work that it had to do. Plans were made to send a suitable replacement part but it was to be some time before the tractor worked properly again because civil war broke out again in Zaire. Many soldiers went on the rampage, stealing, looting, burning, destroying and raping. Missionaries had to be withdrawn and the projects left in the care of their Zairean staff until such time as it was safe to return.

In Brazil, David and Jean Perry worked closely with the Stockleys in the Litoral region of Parana. They had been based in Morretes, not far from Potinga, but the Baptist Convention proposed that they start a new project at Cedro, across the bay of the Paranagua River from Antonina. David and Jean returned to Britain for health reasons and the project was never developed. The Baptist Convention's interest in development projects began to wane and, when David and Joyce Stockley also returned at the end of their contract, the Potinga project at CEBADER was closed down. There are now no rural development projects linked with OA in the State of Parana.

The four-year support programme to help develop the Karnali Technical School at Jumla through the United Mission to Nepal was extended for an additional year. Further building work was required before the school was completed but, right from its early days, young people from the remote villages were being trained in farming, forestry, carpentry and other rural crafts.

The remoteness of many of the villages in Nepal and the difficulties of transport create many problems for the people living there. There are few opportunities for people to travel to other villages or towns to learn new ideas and sick people either have to get better with little medical help or find willing helpers to carry them for several days' journey to the nearest hospital. In 1989, Operation Agri was invited to assist the long-established community health project in the Gorkha area, centred around the Amp Pipal Hospital. Dispensary centres have been established in at least twelve villages within a 50-mile radius of the hospital. A nurse or trained medical helper staffs each dispensary to provide first aid medicine to those with simple ills and sort out those for whom hospital treatment is essential. Motivators are employed to help the villagers develop sources of clean water, improve sanitation. They run simple courses in child care and nutrition, literacy, pre- and post-natal care and pre-school education classes. There is a vaccination programme and records are kept of the response within each village area. They work to a five year plan and Operation Agri has provided grants which continue into the third pentade.



Village people learn about clean water, health and sanitation from a Gorkha project teacher

This period also saw extensive changes in the organisation of the Operation Agri Committee and its officers. Rev Edgar Brown was followed as OA secretary first by the combined services of Maurice Abbott and Ken Targett, then by Tom Markie and later by Bill White. The appointment of Bill White coincided with the movement of the Baptist Missionary Society and the Baptist Union to combined new headquarters in Didcot. Bill lived in Didcot and was able to visit Baptist House on a regular basis to maintain the essential link between BMS and OA officers.

That link also became closer with the formation of a Joint Agricultural and Development Committee (JADEC) on which the Society and OA are equally represented. This Committee receives progress reports from all the projects and is able to help advise on future strategy and make direct recommendations for grant support. Michael Putnam, the treasurer of Operation Agri, was appointed Chairman of this Committee, an office he still retains.



*The Operation Agri Committee meeting in the BMS' Didcot headquarters in 1989.
From left: Stan Crees, Clifford Challiner, Colin Foulkes, Michael Putnam,
Maurice Abbott, Bill White, Joan Motum, Jack Norwood, John Wright,
Russell Ashley-Smith and Brian Gamston*

Maurice Abbott replaced Cecil Richards as Chairman of the OA Committee. Russell Ashley-Smith brought in additional members of his family to assist with publicity and Brian Gamston from Dudley looked after the photographic library. Colin Foulkes, a former BMS agricultural missionary in Bangladesh, succeeded David Rutland as Projects Officer and also edited *Operation Agri News*. Joan Motum continued throughout this period to give sterling service as Farming Partner Secretary, working from her home in Tunbridge Wells since the London office closed when the Society moved to Didcot. Stan Crees, continued as Liaison Officer, keeping in regular touch with the increased numbers of people and projects, as he had done since 1969.

While he was Projects Officer, David Rutland was instrumental in establishing a new department of Operation Agri to collect and refurbish second-hand tools for use in overseas missionary work. With the help of John Varrall, an authority on antique tools, an organisation of collectors was set up throughout Britain. Jack Norwood's workshop in Southend was equipped to renovate a wide range of different carpentry, plumbers', electricians' and other hand tools. Requests for sets of tools or for equipment for specific purposes were vetted by David Rutland who passed the accepted orders to Jack Norwood. Tools for renovation to meet the orders were collected from John Varrall who had a store in his mother's garage. This work was given the name *Tools with a Mission*.

It soon became clear that requests for tools were coming from church groups all over the world and many of these were outside Operation Agri's terms of reference. Rather than have to say 'No' to many of these valid requests, it was decided to establish Tools with a Mission as a separate auxiliary within the Baptist Men's Movement with its own officers and its own terms of reference. Since then TWAM has gone from strength to strength and now has its own fully equipped workshop and barn with telephone and fax facilities.

New Plans New Projects and New Ideas The 1990s

Steve and Pam Seymour at Ntondo in Zaire found themselves in the middle of a takeover bid. The CBFZ Regional Development Co-ordinator for the region opened discussions with a German Aid Agency, EZE, for that body to be responsible for financing development in the area North and East of Ntondo. EZE are provided with funds collected from wages and salaries by the German government for use in overseas development projects. The proposal was for them to make considerable funds available to a development office at Ntondo, staffed by a Director, office staff and numerous "animateurs" (agricultural development workers). CBFZ proposed that BMS (through Operation Agri) should be responsible for the area South and West of Ntondo.

Meetings were held in London between EZE, BMS and OA representatives to attempt to clarify lines of demarcation and areas of responsibility. It was felt that there would be an unfortunate dividing line between the wealthy EZE-supported project and the BMS/OA project with relatively little funding available and the potential for jealousy and envy. In spite of knowing this to be the possible outcome, CBFZ insisted that they wished to go ahead with Steve Seymour acting as the liaison between the two Ntondo projects.



*Levelling an
airstrip near
Ntondo for village
and missionary
use*

At the same time it was noted that EZE were not proposing to become involved with the developing clean water project which had been started during Jack Norwood's visit. The villages with new wells were both South and North of

Ntondo but the concrete aprons and access windlasses were not being maintained. Steve Seymour was asked to extend his activities to both maintain existing wells and develop new ones. However, before he could do much other than survey the situation, Pam Seymour had to return home for health reasons and Steve requested leave to undertake a course of study at Wye College.

The proposed agreement with EZE was overtaken by the political and civil war problems and they decided not to proceed with their proposed project in the area because of the local difficulties. Some of these difficulties related to personality clashes and the decision by CBFZ to move their Regional Development office to Mbandaka. At the same time it was Steve Seymour's opinion, endorsed by the Society, that the Ntondo project should be brought to an end. A grant was made to enable workers to be paid off and the buildings and equipment were put into the care of the local church. This was a bitter blow to the people of Ntondo who had come to rely on the project for paid work, and several further applications for funds were made and considered by JADEC, but they were forced to take the hard decision that any further funds would be largely wasted. It led to much heart-searching and questioning as to what had been achieved in the 20 years of the project.

Contacts with a Zairian lay organisation called the George Grenfell Foundation were also disappointing. They came forward with very grandiose ideas for socio-economic, agricultural development and community health programmes in the area around Bolobo. Whilst JADEC was sympathetic with the general principles of their programme, it did feel that the proposals were aimed more at providing capital investment and wages for the Bolobo area than at permanent agricultural and community development. However, they "tested the water" by providing support for one specific proposal – the establishment of a plantation of oil palms. The grant was sent but was bogged down by administrative errors and the young oil palm seedlings were never planted.

The work of the Lower River project has been more successful. Land has been cultivated and cropped in most years, in between political upheavals and guerilla warfare. Michael and Carol King, who served the BMS at the Lower River project at Ngombe Lutete, returned to Britain and left missionary service; they have not been replaced at the project. The development project became the responsibility of Pierre Lusadisu under the direction of Rev Nkwansambu Ndonaniele, the CBFZ Regional President for Lower River area. In addition to making grants available for the agricultural extension work and the maintenance of equipment, seeds have been sent for use in the demonstration plots and for distribution.

Pierre Lusadis has recently taken on the role of CBFZ Development Co-ordinator and, when travel in the country is possible, keeps an eye on all the relief and development projects. Some of these have been organised locally by popular request. One such project has been the purchase of a boat (rather like a large barge) fitted with outboard motors so that it can be used to bring produce grown in the villages to Kinshasa for sale and distribution. This collection and distribution of food is undertaken entirely through the churches and any small amount of profit is used to purchase more produce on the next trip. This has been a model of what can be done using local initiative with little input of outside funds.

Regular funding will be required for many years for the development and relief programmes centred on Diptipur, in Orissa, India. Each year, Reuben Senapati has come up with new ideas for extending the work of the West Utkal Centre. Some of them do not stand up to the scrutiny of JADEC while others are considered to have a sound basis. At the request of JADEC, John and Jean Smith undertook an assessment visit back to the project they started 25 years earlier. They found that all sorts of exciting things were happening and praised much of what they saw. Bio gas plants are being constructed in many local villages, the costs being subsidised by the Indian government. The use of



Putting the finishing touches to a village bio-gas plant near Diptipur

methane gas for cooking, heating and lighting is reducing the need to strip trees for wood to burn. A reafforestation programme has been introduced where small plantations of saplings are allowed to grow in the corners of fields and

around many local villages. Frequent training courses are held in many aspects of agricultural development including vegetable cultivation, use of new rice varieties, alternative crops and even the construction of better houses. The needs of women are not forgotten and many courses are arranged for them as well.

The demonstration and training farms at the Rampur and Harlanga outposts are well established as satellites of the main training centre. These have all been under Reuben Senapati's personal supervision which caused John and Jean Smith some concern. In their report on their visit they made a very strong recommendation that Reuben should appoint and train Assistant Directors to take over the control of various sectors of the work including Rampur and Harlanga. Reuben seemed reluctant to relinquish personal control but eventually promoted and trained two of his senior staff. This was obviously the right move because when Reuben had a heart attack the work continued almost uninterrupted until he could take over the reins again. Operation Agri continues to support the work at all three centres on an annual basis, together with finance for the improvement of village water supplies.

It has also been possible to help finance FEBA Radio in India to produce Christian training programmes in the Oriya language. Reuben has been used on several occasions by FEBA and the responses to the farming information and the Christian messages have been overwhelming. There are many small farmers in that part of India who seem to be looking for the opportunity to develop their land and they also appear receptive to the Christian message.

When Operation Agri officers have been able to visit overseas projects, the experiences have had a profound effect upon them. There is a vast difference between reading and hearing about the activities of a project and actually seeing the problems and achievements at first hand. Michael Putnam gained considerable knowledge from his visits to Zaire, Bangladesh and Brazil, and Stan Crees from his tours of several countries. Their appreciation of the projects and their situations has enabled them to understand the projects' activities and advise the Committees accordingly. One other person whose life was changed by seeing at first hand the development work in India was Brian Gamston. He joined Colin Foulkes on a holiday visit to Orissa and Bangladesh and was so moved by the experience that he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to helping the development work. The needs of the underprivileged people in India were so great that he came away convinced that we who have so much should do more to help those who have so little. He was also very impressed at the scale of the development work centred on Diptipur. When Bill White

resigned as Operation Agri Secretary, Brian readily agreed to take over this responsibility to fulfil his resolve to do what he could to help.

Operation Agri has been able to help a number of small family enterprises in Sri Lanka through an organisation called Farms Lanka. This is an inter-denominational Christian organisation set up to help Christian families develop simple enterprises with finance and guidance. Even with only a grant of £1,000 a year, Farms Lanka helps as many as 20 different families. Each family enterprise is given regular support and guidance by field officers from Farms Lanka. The enterprises include goats, chickens, dressmaking, carpentry, car mechanics and a wide range of other cottage industries. This possibly gives the widest benefit from the smallest grant made by Operation Agri.

Grants also benefit many families in Central America. Following requests from the Partner Church organisation in Nicaragua, support has been given to PROVADENIC. This is a development and relief agency that sends motivators to selected villages to help the people through advice, instruction and active participation. One notable achievement in PROVADENIC villages has been a marked reduction in infant mortality from more than 100 deaths per 1000 children born to less than 10 per 1000. This has been the result of better pre-natal care and instruction, better nutrition, an understanding of health issues through improved literacy, upgraded sanitation and the provision of clean drinking water.

Much of what has been achieved in this last decade has been due to projects organised by the overseas Partner Churches. We must not forget the work of the BMS agricultural and development missionaries. Frank and Peggy



Friendship House in the favelas of Campo Grande. Margaret Swires is the BMS missionary with a group of children. SORRIA JESUS AMA VOCE means "Smile, Jesus loves you"

Gouthwaite in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, developed the work of JUNSSEMS, the Social Services Junta of the Baptist Convention. Although churches in the main towns had a well developed structure, people in the villages and slum areas on the edges of townships were less advantaged and needed help with health, education and nutrition. The greatest needs were adult literacy and pre-school education. With the aid of grants from Operation Agri, two community development workers were employed to help with literacy classes and general advice to the people in these groups. This work was extended to the development of 'Friendship Houses' which were both community centres and classrooms. Children from poor families were considerably disadvantaged if and when they went to state schools. Their parents were illiterate and their homes had few amenities so when they started school and mixed with children from clean, literate homes they were excluded and unable to learn. Courses of pre-school education for mothers and children of 4-5 years helped to improve their chances just as they had done in Trapia with Mike and Daveen Wilson. Since these Friendship Houses were established in the Pantanal Region they became known as the Pantanal project.

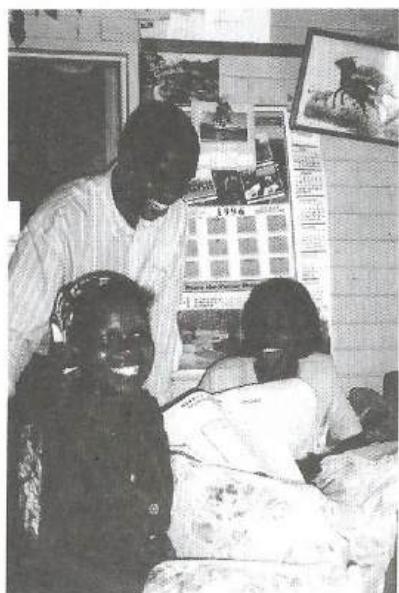
Another project with which Frank was involved was amongst the Kadiweu Indians. These are native South Americans living in village communities in the hills close to the border with Bolivia, about 100 km from Campo Grande, the main city of Mato Grosso do Sul. An evangelical outreach to these Indians had been started by Pastor Amancio and, at his suggestion, some key families in the villages were selected for training in agriculture, literacy, sanitation, nutrition and basic medicine. These families then formed a nucleus in the community to teach and help others. Grants have been made towards the costs of Pastor Amancio's travel and for the training of these key families.

Mike and Daveen Wilson are still working in Trapia, in the North East of Brazil. The agricultural, health and education parts of their work continue, but the exciting new development is that the people have begun to respond to the gospel. In May 1997, a man known as Totonho was the first to commit himself to following Jesus. A year later 47 people were baptised. By the time the Wilsons returned on home assignment in mid-1998, about 150 people had made a commitment and a church was well on the way to being built both in the physical and spiritual sense.

Support has been given to small development projects in El Salvador organised by FEBES, a Baptist Convention. They asked for help for a number of very poor families who had been dispossessed of their property during the guerilla war, and were living on a rubbish tip in huts made out of corrugated iron and

cardboard boxes. Grants were made and tools, sewing machines and other items sent by TWAM to help these families re-establish their dignity and start earning money again. A year or so after the grants and the tools arrived we heard that many families had benefited and were now living in proper houses with means of financial support. Later a small church established a dressmaking business with the purchase of industrial sewing machines. FEBES continues to receive grants to help provide a means of livelihood to destitute families and encourage them by providing courses of instruction in literacy, family care, small scale cropping and animal keeping.

After Steve and Pam Seymour's withdrawal from Ntondo, Steve started a series of studies at Wye College (University of London) first for a Diploma and then for his Master's degree which he completed during his next assignment. The Seymours were invited by Baptist World Aid to go to Zimbabwe to help co-ordinate the relief and development work undertaken by the four Zimbabwean Baptist Unions. Operation Agri provided a suitable vehicle and Steve visited a number of small projects in consultation with Paul Montacute of Baptist World Aid. In discussion with the National Baptist Convention, a programme of development and agricultural extension was prepared. In addition to guiding and helping the formation of agricultural demonstrations, and using these as the basis of short courses of instruction, Steve encouraged the formation of a "Capacity Building Programme" which implies a self-help programme enabling



Mrs Nontondo (foreground) demonstrating her skill at needlecraft to Philip Jambaya (developments manager for National Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe) and Agnes (his assistant) who want Mrs Nontondo to attend the ONE-UP Business Training Course

people to improve their situations. It involves two areas of action: the provision of loans to help finance new enterprises; and guidance and assistance with small businesses. Many families have been helped through a revolving loans scheme with enterprises which have varied from opening a shop, carpentry, plumbing, dressmaking, building and decorating to small garden enterprises. Operation Agri provided the pump-priming funds for loans and has met some of the costs of their "micro-social programme" as well as staff and conference costs.

At one stage it was thought that the Seymours' work permits would only allow them to stay in Zimbabwe for three years but the Convention managed to obtain extensions until Steve finally had to leave and return to Australia on family business at the end of 1997. Some time before they left, Stan Crees paid them a visit and saw something of the ongoing work which is now in the hands of Philip Jambaya who was assisting with development work in the area around Bulawayo.

Much of the continent of Africa has had a turbulent decade. Zimbabwe has been reasonably stable although as the new Millennium approaches there are indications of political unrest with the government proposing to annex land belonging to white farmers and give it to needy black farmers. Zaire has seen nothing but internal warfare with factions of rebel soldiers fighting and looting,



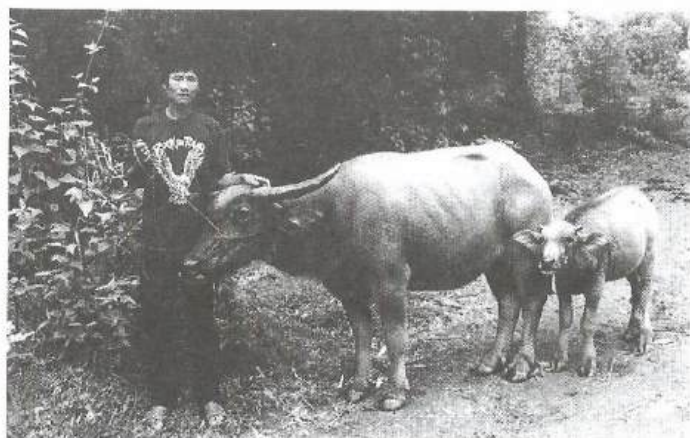
*Manioc and
cassava being
weeded by
"Mamas" in a
self-help plot in
Lower River area
on Congo (Zaire)*

and official forces not behaving any better. Mobutu's government was overthrown and the new administration renamed the country: *The Democratic Republic of Congo*. It is surprising that, in spite of all the strife and turmoil, development programmes have continued. Reference has already been made

to the ongoing work in the Lower River area and the various self-help schemes such as the purchase of a riverboat. The TELEMA project has also continued, though there have been periods when they have had to be left to fend for themselves because of lack of communication and failure of the CBFZ (now the CBFC) to get funds to them. A rice de-huller machine was purchased for them and eventually reached them though, like the tractor for the Lower River, actual delivery and establishment was many months after it arrived at the port.

EZE, the German Aid Agency, is proposing to amalgamate all the relief and development programmes in this part of the Republic of Congo and develop them with the huge funds available at their disposal. It is suggested that Operation Agri should be responsible for one specific but minor part of the programme – possibly the development of work amongst women – but JADEC, fearing that this might lead to similar jealousies to those which led to problems in Ntongo, decided to withdraw completely from TELEMA if and when EZE took over.

As work in one area becomes restricted or even closes, work in new areas becomes possible. During this period Operation Agri has become interested in new work in Thailand, Albania and in Nepal. The Lahu Baptist Convention, which works in the North of Thailand, were concerned about the poor farmers living in small hill villages close to the border with Burma. They were unable to do much more than use hand tools to scratch small areas of land to grow their crops because they did not have access to machinery or even to oxen. The Convention requested help for a scheme to provide these farmers with breeding buffaloes to pull ploughs and produce calves. Not only would they provide motive power but also much needed milk. Over a period of three years, grants were made for the purchase and distribution of 80 breeding



*Yo Na Lahuma
with buffalo and calf
in Huae Pu Mai in
North Thailand*

buffaloes. JADEC and Operation Agri were soon inundated with photographs of proud owners standing by newly arrived buffaloes, often with their calves.

These hill tribes are so poor that they are known to sell their children, boys and girls, for prostitution in Bangkok. The Lahu Baptist Convention launched a very ambitious development programme in 1996 to help the poorer villagers improve their conditions and incomes so that they would no longer need to sell their children but could find them remunerative work to do in the villages. The programme included agricultural extension, irrigation, fish farming, co-operative enterprises, co-ordinated marketing, community development and work amongst the women. The cost of each of the three years of the scheme was beyond the capabilities of Operation Agri but the Baptist Union of Sweden stepped in with support for the major part of the project with OA providing £5,000 each year towards the costs.

At the request of the European Baptist Federation, Operation Agri has also been supporting relief and development work in Albania. The first grant was for cereal seed for distribution to lowland farmers who had regained their land from the huge co-operative farms. This was purchased in Germany and carried by road freight across Europe to Albania. It was distributed in and around Gajush, sown and grew well. The only problem that followed was wrangling over who owned the land and who had the right of harvesting the crop. Such disputes over land ownership still continue and can lead to bloodshed. After 50 years of communist domination where all land was annexed into public ownership, the divisions between fields have become blurred and the original owners have died. It is small wonder they are having problems sorting it all out!

David Stockley was asked to visit Albania in 1993 to make an assessment of development opportunities. He visited several areas of that country including Tirana, the lowland region and some mountain village areas. One such area was Gajush and, on David's recommendation, a van load of tools was supplied by TWAM and driven to Albania; Operation Agri paid the cost of transport. Glyn and Gill Jones were appointed by BMS to work in a development capacity based in Tirana. They found that the University of Tirana had very few technical agricultural journals and publications and no funds to buy them from the publishers. They were devoid of the type of study material needed by pre- and post-graduates in the Science and Agriculture Faculty. Operation Agri set aside more than £1,000 for subscriptions to internationally recognised technical journals and one member of JADEC, formerly on the staff of the Vegetable Research Institute, arranged for many of the sets of journals in their library to

be sent to Albania when the Institute closed. A number of good quality microscopes were also sent to Tirana

Grants were made for further supplies of seeds, mainly pulses, and the production of good quality hybrid maize for farms in Lezhë (coastal plain) and Noja (mountain). These were sold (often at a subsidised price) to local farmers. Such grants became an annual feature of Operation Agri support for Albania.

George Baird, a lecturer/consultant at Cupar Technical College also visited Albania to see what could be done to re-establish agricultural and veterinary education. After an extensive survey of the teaching needs, he proposed a series of modular training courses leading to recognised vocational qualifications.



Teaching students in Albania about the modern seed drill

This was accepted by the European Union as a PHARE project and phase 1 was introduced with some additional funds from Operation Agri.

Unfortunately before Phase 2 could be introduced, riots engulfed Albania and led to much wanton destruction. Most educational facilities were closed down. This included the University which was wrecked by rioters and all the books and periodicals burned. None of the books or microscopes survived the riots. The University was back again to where it had been with no technical materials for students to study. What a waste! Phase 2 of the vocational training proposed by George Baird has recently been approved as a PHARE project and should recommence in early 1999.

Geoff Timms and Roger Pearce have also been working in Albania. Geoff has now returned but Roger is still linked to educational promotion in the mountain villages. Development there has included some road building to make vehicle

access possible. David Wheeler requested a road roller and a concrete vibrator to help develop the infrastructure. These were supplied by TWAM and sent at Operation Agri's expense.

The most recent development in Albania has been the establishment of a small factory making concrete roof tiles and wall slabs. This is under the control of David Wheeler who is training Elton Tahilari to take charge of the scheme. Two other satellite block making units are planned and it may be possible for further machines to be supplied through Operation Agri which can be loaned



A school re-roofed with tiles made by the tile-making project in Albania

or leased to groups of two or three Albanians to use in their own villages. In addition to providing employment, the output of roof tiles and building slabs is helping the reconstruction of buildings in towns and villages.

In the previous chapter reference was made to the support given to the Gorkha Community Health Project in Nepal. Further grants have been sent each year for this work amongst the isolated village communities, and further help promised at least until the year 2001. The work at Gorkha was featured in the 1998 Joint Harvest Appeal video. Then the United Mission to Nepal requested support for a similar non-formal education project based at Jajarkot. Like Gorkha, this was not a new project but one that had been running for some time and needed further finance to allow it to continue and expand. The main strategy is to train local people in basic skills and vocational tasks, using local facilities wherever possible. The work involves water supplies and sanitation, smokeless stoves, a tree nursery, distribution of fruit tree seedlings and instruction for women's groups in literacy, child care, nutrition and community health issues. Annual grants of £10,000 have been made since 1994 but the work had to be suspended in 1998 because of threats from Maoists. It is hoped to re-start once the political situation has calmed down.

A one-off grant of £5,000 was made to the Butwal Technical Institute in Nepal in 1996 to allow them to purchase modern teaching aids such as overhead projectors. More recently Operation Agri agreed to support, with an annual grant, the work of the Yala Urban Health Programme based around the Patan Hospital and currently supervised by BMS missionary, Christine Preston. At the same time requests were received from the International Nepal Fellowship for financial help with the Nepalgunj Community Health Project. Nepalgunj is a town of about 70,000 people in the South West of Nepal close to the border with India. The programme, under the leadership of Alison Craven and Rodger Vickers, includes similar training and development to the other Nepali programmes. Support for Yala and Nepalgunj for three years has been approved.

Two projects from the Nepal Baptist Union with rather different approaches have been accepted for grant aid. The NPU is assisted in its outreach by Christians from Mizoram who have agreed to undertake a three year, non-formal education programme in the Chitwan district. This will include 50 literacy classes. The second project is at Meghauli where construction of new latrines will be the major development. Both projects will be supported by Operation Agri.

It has been good in the past year to receive some new requests from Angola. This was one of the first areas to receive agricultural missionary input in 1960 but the withdrawal of the Portuguese and the civil war that followed made it impossible to continue any missionary or development work until recently. Two projects are to be supported: one to provide rehabilitation and training for street children, many of them orphans of the war. The other is the development of farm land at Quipedro for demonstrations of new crops and techniques. Both projects are receiving OA grants but everyone is watching with concern the continuing warfare between African forces and the rebels which may result in postponement of this badly needed help.

Through the 1990s the Operation Agri Committee suffered a series of blows. First was the very sudden death of the Chairman of the Committee, Maurice Abbott. Maurice set out from home one evening in September 1992 to speak on behalf of OA at a Harvest Supper. He never reached the Church: on the way he suffered a massive heart attack as he drove and died at the wheel of his car. Russell Ashley-Smith reluctantly assumed the Chairman's duties until 1995 when he was sent by FEBA Radio, his employers, to develop their work in South Africa. Tom Markie – even more reluctantly – became a caretaker Chairman for a year. Then the Committee was pleased to accept the offer of Rev Dr David Pusey to take over the Chair. David had been a very early supporter of Operation Agri and had spoken on its behalf a number of times in

the 1960s but pressure of work as a College Lecturer and as a lay preacher in the London area had prevented any further activity with OA since. Now ordained and a pastor of a small church in Pembrokeshire, he felt able to offer his further service.

Heart problems also forced the resignation in 1997 of Brian Gamston as Secretary and Phil Smith as Projects Officer. Dr Geoff Peterson was appointed Acting Secretary until the position could be advertised and filled. Then came the sad news that Brian Gamston had died following an operation from which it appeared he was recovering. Then the Committee learned a year later that Phil Smith, who had been Projects Officer from 1995-97, had died and also Cecil Richards who had been Chairman 1979-83.

Roy Teague, formerly an Assistant Education Officer from Rochdale, was eventually appointed in late 1997 as OA Secretary and, after a short period when Mrs Marjorie Fox looked after projects, Colin Foulkes took over temporarily until Gill Jones was appointed Projects Officer in early 1999.

Meanwhile Stan Crees continued to maintain contact with all the key people in the overseas development projects in which OA was interested. One of them, commenting on how well they had been kept in touch by letters and e-mails from Stan paid him a rare compliment on his return by telling the Committee: *"He wrote to me so regularly and in such a caring fashion that I thought I was the only one on his mailing list. It wasn't until I came home that I realised that Stan was in touch with all the others in a similar, loving and caring way. It was like having a friend and a pastor rolled into one."*

Stan's care and concern for the people working overseas has led him to make private visits to several of the areas supported by Operation Agri. With a friend he made an extensive tour of Brazil, visiting Trapia, Campo Grande as well as some of the missionary work in other parts of Brazil.

So, nearly 40 years after the adoption of Operation Agri by BMM, the projects and plans have multiplied and extended into new countries, new fields of activity and with new people. From the small start of £400 in 1961, expenditure has grown to a record £167,000 in 1997; expenditure in subsequent years was a little lower. Operation Agri has been able to extend its help to some much larger schemes because of the continuous growth of its funds through most generous gifts, regular Farming Partner contributions, donations from groups, legacies, in memoriam gifts and the half share of the Harvest Appeal income each year.

The work is still growing; the vision of work to be done greatly enlarged. More missionaries are needed with a concern not only to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ but to be involved in the mission to the whole man. There are so many people in the areas where the BMS and its Partner Churches are working and where ignorance and deprivation have resulted in human misery, sickness, hunger and premature death, that the needs are vast and seem to grow more rather than less. But better food, clean water, community health education programmes and other development projects can all help to improve the quality of life and reveal the God of love.

*Expect great things from God;
Attempt great things for God.
(William Carey)*

Officers of Operation Agri from 1961

Chairmen

1961 – 68	Cyril Petch
1968 – 74	Fred Ince
1974 – 79	Peter Hewlett
1979 – 83	Cecil Richards
1983 – 92	Maurice Abbott
1992 – 95	Russell Ashley-Smith
1995 – 96	Tom Markie
1996 –	David Pusey

Secretaries

1961 – 67	Michael Putnam
1967 – 69	Cyril Petch
1969 – 75	Ray Montacute
1975 – 76	Fred Eldred
1976 – 82	Maurice Abbott
1982 – 83	Edgar Brown
1983 – 84	Maurice Abbott
	/Ken Targett
1984 – 89	Torn Markie
1989 – 93	Bill White
1993 – 97	Brian Gamston
1997	Geoff Peterson
	(Acting)
1997 –	Roy Teague

Treasurers

1961 – 64	Fred Webb
1964 – 71	Charles Bland
1971 – 73	Bill Lloyd
1973 –	Michael Putnam

Purchasing/Liaison Officer

1968 –	Stan Crees
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Publicity Officer

1968 – 95	Russell Ashley-Smith
1997 – 98	David Perry

Editor, OA News

1961 – 67	Michael Putnam
1968 – 88	Bill Ashley-Smith
	(assisting Russell
	Ashley-Smith
1988 – 91	Colin Foulkes
1991 –	Joe Beach

Photographic librarian

1989 – 97	Brian Gamston
1997 –	Colin Foulkes

Farming Partner Secretaries

1965 – 74	Peter Hewlett
1974 – 80	Audrey Sheppard
1980 –	Joan Motum

Project Officers

1979 – 85	David Rutland
1986 – 95	Colin Foulkes
1995 – 97	Phil Smith
1997 – 98	Marjorie Fox
1998 – 99	Colin Foulkes
1999 –	Gillian Jones

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