

First Report from Oliver Maurice in Africa

Monday 15th November

I arrived safely this morning after 3 hours sleep on the plane from Heathrow .The journey was only 7 hours and clocks go forward 3 so I virtually missed out on the night!

There was no-one waiting for me at the airport at 7 am, contrary to plans, so I took a taxi, the driver of which took about an hour to find the guest house which was only 5 mins from the airport! Fortunately I had negotiated a price before we set out!

I had just had breakfast and fallen asleep when Princess Mariam, Granddaughter of the late Emperor Hailé Selassie and CEO of Addis Woubet (INTO Member), www.addiswoubet.com, knocked on my door to take me off for the day! She is a delightful and inspirational lady who appeared to know everyone. Doors were opened hands were shaken etc etc. She is effectively running Addis Woubet single-handed, with occasional short term support from others

She gave me a whistle stop tour of some of the older buildings in this bustling city explaining the different architectural influences which were apparent as we went round, ranging from Indian and Italian (during their occupation from 1935 -40) and Armenian before showing me around her pet proposal, a lovely old Indian building, named after the owner, Mohammed Ali, a trader who established a salt factory in Addis, which she is trying to restore and open to the public. Within the building will be an information centre on historic preservation, a shop, cafe and an exhibition area. Part will become the Addis Woubet Office.

Work has already started, wooden scaffolding surrounds the building, floors have been taken up and much material is on site, and although it appears there is an enormous amount still to be done, she assured me that the outstanding finance required was only €130,000. She has managed to obtain substantial grant aid from various international sources. I promised that INTO would help her in the search for the balance.

After lunch we had a meeting with Natalia Hirsch, a French girl running a very interesting environmental scheme called the Ethiopian Home Gardens Project (www.homegardensofethiopia.com). I was told that in Ethiopia gardens are the expression of the multiplicity of differing rural cultures.

The aim of the project is to develop the horticultural heritage of home gardens while preserving their agro-biodiversity in situ. The scheme becomes sustainable through the promotion and sale of the local products: thus it promotes the conservation of both the tangible natural heritage and the intangible cultural heritage. The products that I saw were in themselves very diverse, not just food but also many others, including bamboo and using all the fibrous waste material. It was displayed in a highly professional way. The plan is for these products to be on sale at the Mohammed Ali House and the income raised will go towards the restoration costs.

After this meeting the Princess's driver took me back to the Guesthouse for a sleep and then she picked me up later for a delicious dinner with a cousin and her American husband, as well as an Orthodox Jewish Bishop, in their lovely 1960's house

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I had a further meeting at the Guesthouse with Princess Mariam to encapsulate our discussions at which I made a number of recommendations as to how INTO might help in the future and some immediate actions that she might take regarding the Mohammed Ali House. In particular I insisted that she and Natalia must come to the 14 ICNT in Victoria and give a presentation about their joint schemes (best practice). She in turn, would like me to return in April to give a talk on INTO at a Conference focusing on Heritage Conservation and Development. I promised to do so if she could find the necessary funding!

At midday she gave me a lift to the airport for stage 2 of my journey to Uganda via Nairobi.

At 7pm I arrived at Entebbe airport where John de Coninck was waiting to meet me. He drove me to Kampala, around 50 km, and for much of the journey we moved at snail's pace, it being the end of a public holiday. We reached my lodgings at the Makerere University Guesthouse at 9 30 pm and after a beer together, I gratefully collapsed into bed!