



Back to the Source:
A Gambian Journal & Memoir

Patrick Dunn

This journal and memoir is an engaging, amusing and original account of circumstances and episodes experienced by the author during the almost year and a half he spent as a volunteer education management advisor in West Africa – mostly in the interior a 180 miles up the Gambia river – during 2010/11. It follows a chronological sequence presenting extracts from the journal he kept at the time within a main text which includes other memories initially unrecorded, subsequent thoughts, researches and opinions. Stylistically it might be described as literary nonfiction.

The journal is also frequently interspersed with analogous/parallel extracts from Francis Moore's 'Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa...' which was published in London in 1738. These are meant to act as a counterpoint to this author's own experiences and in doing so often introduce a humorous note.

There is an underlying plea for us in the West to regard African culture and values with equal legitimacy to our own which intentionally or not we often don't. There are too glimpses of deeper truths about the importance of our African beginnings to all human kind and its global destiny.

The book does not purport to be academic historically, anthropologically or in any other way but occasionally the author calls up a few statistics and historical events to underscore and/or contextualise what he has recorded. It is hoped a sense will emerge for the reader of how firmly rooted is a basic animism and a belief in magic and superstition in most West Africans and how we in the West might be prompted to reassess our own belief systems and assumptions and see them as very definitely contingent and received rather than absolute and inevitable.

About the author

Prior to the time he spent in West Africa as an education management advisor Patrick had a long career in education in the UK – mainly in the Further Education sector – initially as a teacher/lecturer and subsequently as a senior manager. Since his retirement from education he has established himself as a dealer in rare books.

He was born in South Yorkshire but grew up in Norfolk and has also lived in Canada. He graduated in Philosophy, has three daughters and lived in London. Patrick died on 15 November 2021.

(Photo courtesy of Ken Hyam)

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