

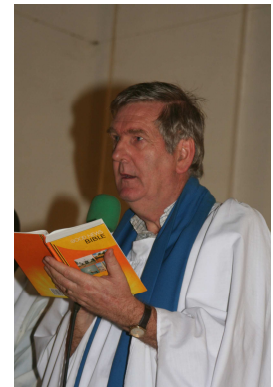
# At home with John and Poppy Spens



John and Poppy Spens (left), who hail from Winchester, England, are currently CMS Ireland associates and live in Emerald Cottage inside the Yei Vocational Training College compound.

They moved to Yei for six months when CMSI mission partners Billy and Jenny Smyth returned to Connor, and three years later are still there. John originally ran the VTC, though that task has been handed to Canon John Kanyikwa, and Poppy runs the Martha Clinic. That and much more besides, for the Spens are very busy people.

Reflecting on their decision to come to Yei, John said: “We worked in the UK where I was in management and Poppy was a health visitor. We did that for 30 years and when I was about 52 we began to do a little mission work.” They visited South Africa and Kenya on short term mission projects, and were active members of their own church.



“We were incredibly comfortably off. I was at the peak of my earning potential, but we asked ourselves if that was what we wanted to do for the rest of our lives. So we volunteered and CMSI took us on for a year. But we realised that there was not much we could do in a year, so we stayed a second and then a third year. God is leading us step by step.”



Emerald Cottage (left) is a far cry from the home comforts the Spens enjoy when they return to Winchester. The have a long drop toilet outside, a cement floor, sparse locally made furniture and no glass in their windows. When they arrived, the only cooking facility was a charcoal oven (right). But Emerald Cottage is very much a home and

emanates warmth and welcome. “It is a bit like camping,” said John, “but it is much more comfortable than what most Sudanese people have to live in.” (Below – John and Poppy chat with David Cromie in the living room at Emerald Cottage).



John went on: “There are enormous frustrations but also great rewards. Like Mongo School. It was a real struggle, Saturday after Saturday trying to balance the books, but it was well worth it when we saw the finished product.

“Nothing is easy here. I used to run a housing association with 160 people and a budget of £20 million. Eighty per cent of what I did was predictable. In Sudan 80 per cent is unpredictable, everything is a challenge. You need tenacity and improvisation.”